

# THE MONTH

AUGUST 1950

**HELENA—III**

EVELYN WAUGH

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SIMON TOWNELEY WORSTHORNE

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THE STORY OF A RECONVERSION**

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## News about Books

**F**EW novels which we have published recently have been reviewed more favourably than *THE LEADEN CUPID*, by Basil Creighton (7s. 6d.). Here are some personal opinions: "As charming and restful as a carriage in the Park, circa 1900," Seán Fielding (*Tatler*); "Full of mirth and culture," Silva Norman (*Spectator*); "A completely successful and amusing entertainment," John Betjeman (*Daily Herald*); "Aims to amuse and succeeds in a moment of real enchantment," Angus Wilson (*Listener*); "An admirable little comedy, witty and vivacious, with a subtlety all its own," E. Forbes-Boyd (*Sunday Times*). This is praise indeed. We have also reprinted once again *THE HEIR* by V. Sackville-West (6s.), and when we add Robert Hichens' *THE GREEN CARNATION* (8s. 6d.), here is a trio of novels for summer entertainment which we respectfully recommend to discriminating readers.

**I**s any reader of these notes interested in gardening, collecting old furniture, games of Patience, or playing the organ? *THE WEEK-END GARDENER* (12s. 6d.) by F. Hadfield Farthing is a practical guide to work in the garden during every week of the year, with special reference to favourite flowers and shrubs, while vegetables are not neglected. We are just reprinting it for the eighth time. *TIME, TASTE AND FURNITURE* (15s.) by John Gloag is an illustrated history of English furniture from the fifteenth century, written by an expert. There are 64 plates, illustrating old and new furniture and period rooms, and 173 line drawings. Most furniture books are expensive: this one is not. Basil Dalton's compilation *THE COMPLETE PATIENCE BOOK* (5s.) contains all there is to be said about Patience, with 51 examples of Single-Pack Patiences, 56 of Double-Pack, and a final section devoted to Problems and Puzzles. Lastly, *THE COMPLETE ORGANIST* (7s. 6d.) by Harvey Grace is, we believe, the only work on the subject. Dr. Harvey Grace was formerly the Editor of *The Musical Times*, and for several years held the post of organist at Chichester Cathedral.

**Q** This news-letter is issued by The Richards Press Ltd. & The Unicorn Press (Martin Secker: Director), No. 8 Charles Street, St. James's Square, S.W.1, WHI 4239.

# HELENA<sup>1</sup>

By  
EVELYN WAUGH

## *The Innocence of Bishop Macarius*

HELENA started on her pilgrimage in the early autumn of the year 326. Nicomedia was the starting-point. There, at that time, the communications of the Empire converged. There the limitless resources of the Treasury were put at her disposal. The official machine smoothly prepared her way and equipped her caravan.

She moved at an easy pace, going out of her way and pausing at Drepanum to order a church for St. Lucian, then turning inland to the trunk road through Ancyra, Tarsus, Antioch and Lydda. Wherever she went with her mixed task-force of guards and her train of bullion, she was greeted by clergy and officials and populace, prostrating themselves and applauding. She endowed convents, freed prisoners, dowered orphans, directed the buildings of shrines and basilicas. She saw the sights and she venerated the scenes of Christian history. She gave huge tips to the hierarchy. She moved in a golden haze of benefaction, welcomed, it seemed, and dearly beloved of all. She could not know the dismay which her approach was causing in one innocent breast.

For Macarius, Bishop of Aelia Capitolina, was most certainly innocent. He well knew that false accusations were as distasteful to God as evasions and concealments. He had been into the whole matter, again and again, minutely, and found no breath of impure motive anywhere in his whole conduct.

When Macarius examined his conscience it was with the method and trained observation of a field-naturalist in a later age studying the life of a pond. Less scientific penitents noted merely the few big fish; the squeamish recoiled from the weed and scum and with closed eyes blurted out an emotional, inaccurate tale of

<sup>1</sup> From a forthcoming novel to be published by Messrs. Chapman and Hall.

self-reproach. But through all his long life the Bishop had refined his knowledge of the soul until each opacity, each microscopic germ had a peculiar significance for him. He knew what was noxious, what was harmless, what was of value. So, now, in the great matter of the Holy Sepulchre he gazed through fathoms of limpid sweet water and pronounced himself blameless.

And yet he *was* being blamed, by the Prefect among others. It was the Prefect who first brought the news, coming to call on the Bishop one warm September morning and spoiling a day of promised calm.

"You see what you've done now," said the Prefect. "I hope you're satisfied."

The very fact of the Prefect coming to call showed how things had changed for Macarius in the last eighteen months. Two years ago he would have sent for him to Government House. A few years before that he would either have denied all knowledge of Macarius's existence or clapped him in gaol.

"How in God's name," asked the Prefect, "do you think I can put up the Empress Dowager? It was a miserable enough place even before you started messing about with it. Now what with builders and pilgrims and half the streets up, it simply isn't habitable. How am I going to protect her? The only thing they haven't increased is *my* establishment."

"Believe me," said Bishop Macarius, "I really am very sorry about it. I never intended anything like this to happen."

It had begun at Nicaea the summer before. That opportunity was unique. For the first time in history the Church appeared in her majesty—the Papal legates, the Emperor, the assembled hierarchy of all Christendom. Many of the higher clergy had complaints against one another of heresy, treachery and magic. Constantine burned these, ostensibly unread. But Macarius had a petition of another order. Small-minded men might impute self-seeking to him, but Macarius knew better. He willed nothing except the greater glory of God and this high purpose was being frustrated by a vexatious anomaly in the position of his own see.

For his Aelia Capitolina was nothing less than the ancient, holy city of Jerusalem, the very umbilical point of Christian devotion. In and about this little garrison town God's chosen people had fulfilled their destiny. Here Our Lord and His Blessed Mother



were born, had died and ascended to heaven. Here the Holy Ghost had fallen in tongues of fire upon the newborn Church. Macarius was hourly appalled by his own unworthiness to set up his throne on the scene of these events. He would gladly have made way for a more powerful man if by that means he could secure for the holy city the honour due to it. But in fact it was scarcely honoured at all. A quirk of the civil administration made it a suffragan see and—what made it the more bitter—suffragan Caesarea, a place of little history and that little, bad; the creation of Herod, a commercial port reeking of idolatry, officialdom and vice. That anomaly must be righted sooner or later. But Macarius might have shrunk from pressing his own claims and left the matter to time, had there not been a reason for extreme urgency. Eusebius of Caesarea was not a man he could serve with a good conscience. He was a politician and man-of-letters, a supercilious, unscrupulous man, a fit ally for his namesake of Nicomedia and, like him, deep in the black heart of the Arian conspiracy. There were maimed veterans of the persecution in Caesarea who, when they saw their bishop going about his high affairs, remarked that they had seen him passing in and out of the prison compound in just that way, elegant, self-possessed, bearing neat little rolls of manuscript, when they lay in chains; an apostate, perhaps an informer.

Macarius could not expose his clergy and his people to that malign influence. But he stated his claim at Nicaea on the first consideration alone.

The Council was sympathetic and passed a non-committal resolution. He was given the pallium and a private audience. The Emperor was positively affable. Macarius reminded him of the glories of Zion. The Emperor seemed captivated. Was it then perhaps that his shadowy mind saw in a first reflected gleam the opposed faces of history and myth? The new religion with which he busied himself had many attractions; it inculcated a convenient ethic of brotherhood, peace and obedience; it offered powerful magical rewards of protection, forgiveness and immortality. But had Constantine ever made a distinction between the stories that were told of Galilee and those of Olympus? Now for the first time he was talking face to face with a man who handled, who held in his particular charge, the identical wreath of thorn which had crowned the dying God three hundred years ago.

"Can you be sure?"

"But, of course, sir. Ever since that day the Church of Jerusalem has guarded it. Mary herself picked it up and carried it home. It went with them to Pella and returned with them when the laws were relaxed. We have the spear, too, you know, which pierced His side and many other things of the kind."

"Extraordinary," said the Emperor, adding the eternal querulous protest of baffled authority, "Why was I never told?"

Macarius told him all about Jerusalem; of how through all its vicissitudes the Christian haunted it, ruined or rebuilt, and so kept continuous and alive the secret tradition of the holy places; of the Garden of Gethsemane, the upper room of the Last Supper, the sorrowful way from court-house to Calvary.

Thus quite naturally, inevitably, he was led on to speak of the project nearest his heart. He had come to Nicaea hoping to interest somebody in it, never hoping for this golden propitious moment of confidence.

"And then," he said, "there is, of course, the holiest of all the holy places—the sepulchre itself."

"You know where that is?"

"Within a few yards. The Emperor Hadrian buried it two hundred years ago when he laid out the new city. People say he did so deliberately to suppress the cult and built the temple of Venus on it as an insult. But I doubt very much whether he knew of its existence. The Christians used to go there in ones and twos after dark. It was all kept very quiet for fear the authorities would destroy it. What they did in effect was to preserve it. I expect that the engineers just drew their plans from the map without considering the matter at all. It was providential that they covered it up. They might so easily have cut it clean away. It wouldn't be at all a big task to uncover it again."

Not at all a big task! How often Macarius had looked at that broad, crowded terrace, sick at heart for what was below. The trees in the little garden were gnarled, the paving had been worn and renewed and worn again, the statue, even, had mellowed in two centuries and lost something of its impudicity. The whole place proclaimed its permanence. Oh for the Faith that moved mountains! This was something quite beyond the hope of human accomplishment. Not till the end of the world, perhaps, would that treasure come to light.



So Macarius had thought during the days of persecution. But now the trumpets everywhere were sounding for victory, and here was he talking with the Emperor, the source of all material power. The thing was quite easy. Just the shovelling up of a heap of dust. And thus Constantine saw it. He gave the order like a housewife having a cupboard cleared.

"Certainly," he said, "start at once, as soon as you get back. I'll see you get all the labour you need. Do the thing properly. Make a decent job of it."

Was it a decent job? That was the question which drove Macarius back and back again into his own innocent conscience, to learn how things had gone wrong. It was a year, now, since the interview at Nicaea. Wonders had indeed been performed but Macarius was not happy.

The first excavations were easy enough. The site which the Christians had always pointed out as the scene of the Crucifixion and Resurrection lay almost in the centre of the new town. There was no trace now above ground of the walls which had once run near it. Aelia Capitolina lay flat across them, half out of what had once been the old city; a rectangle set down by the planners among hills and valleys and ruins and dry waterworks. It might have lain in Britain or Africa; a standard, second-century garrison town. The temple of Venus, the garden and the cross-roads stood on what had once been a little gulley between rocky hills. Hadrian's engineers had filled it with rubble—there was no lack of that—and levelled it. Constantine's engineers now swept it clear. There was no difficulty in distinguishing the natural rock when they struck it. In a few months the whole site lay exposed, the two little hills plainly evident and the dip between them. The smaller hill was Golgotha. Thirty yards distant, half-way up the opposing slope, was the tomb, a step down, a perpendicular rock face cut in the hillside, a low door, a vestibule and the inner chamber where the sacred body had lain; all just as Macarius had pictured it.

Countless times in his meditations Macarius had trodden the road to Golgotha pausing at each sad station. He had stood benighted beside the three crosses and lingered, when the rest had gone home, at the blocked tomb with Mary Magdalen and Mary the Mother of God. It was home ground, this acre of rock, a

patrimony reclaimed. He was quite at his ease rejoicing on his knees in the little cave.

News of the operation flashed to Constantine from tower to tower of the chain of signal-posts that ran from Caesarea to Nicomedia. It came at the right moment. Constantine had newly arrived cross and dispirited and lonely from his Roman holiday. He needed something of just this kind, some new resounding conquest, another miracle. And here it was, a sure pledge that anything untoward which had happened on the Palatine was forgiven and forgotten and that he was back again in the full unshaded glare of Divine favour.

He wrote at once, exuberantly, to Macarius:

*How God loves Us! Words fail. Victorious in war, free in conscience. We are now the recipients of a stupendous revelation, hidden for generations—the sepulchre itself, the original monument of the Passion and Resurrection. The mind boggles. This just shows how right We were to accept the Christian religion. See that they don't put back that idolatrous temple. We will build a church there instead; the finest church in the world outdoing every other in every detail. You and the Governor and Dracilianus must see to this. Just ask for whatever you need. How many columns will it take? How much other marble? Make it strong and gorgeous. Write and tell me what to send. This is a unique place and needs unique treatment. Would you prefer the roof domed or flat? If the former, it should be gilded. Get your estimates out as soon as you can. How about the rafters and wood panelling, if you decide on a flat roof? Let me know. God bless you, dear Brother.*

That was the letter, brimming with benevolence, which shook the Bishop from his mood of placid rejoicing. There was something disconcerting about the Emperor's enthusiasm. Macarius knew that things would not be left as they stood. The place could not be kept for his own meditations or the edification of his local congregation. There would be pilgrims. Something must be done to protect the holy places, something, also, to accommodate visitors. But "the finest church in the world, outdoing every other in every detail"—these words from the man who had already staggered the Empire with his scale of church building, who in Rome alone had spent the payroll of an army, who was now planning prodigious erections at Byzantium—these words from such a man were exorbitant. What did Macarius, a provin-

cial clergyman, who had spent most of his life dodging the police, know of porphyry and gold leaf?

Everyone was exceedingly civil to him. The Governor and the architect Dracilianus and all the contractors and clerks-of-the-works seemed to defer to him, and yet helplessly he felt that everything was being spoiled.

If only the Imperial architects had not been consumed with this passion for symmetry! No sooner had Dracilianus surveyed the site, than he spoke of levelling and orientating it. He failed to hide his annoyance that the sepulchre did not lie dead west of Calvary and even hinted that perhaps this might be arranged; there at least Macarius was obdurate. What Dracilianus finally did, however, was nearly as bad. Macarius was shown the plans and the elevations; he was told a multitude of technical terms. He consented, not knowing what was proposed. And at once the holy places swarmed with workmen. There were barrows and gang-planks and scaffolding everywhere; the whole area was screened from observation and though Macarius had the *entrée* he found himself lost among dust and industry.

Months later Dracilianus's plan was revealed. Everything was transformed. Where Hadrian had levelled up, he had levelled down. Taking the floor of the sepulchre as his mean, Dracilianus had created a new, perfectly flat platform. The hill in which the sepulchre stood had been cut away, leaving only a thin, geometrically regular mass of stone round the sepulchre itself so that what had been a cave was now a tiny house. The hill of Calvary had been trimmed to a cube; it lay outside the future basilica; this was strictly orientated on the axis of the tomb. There were pegs and lines and trenches everywhere marking the proposed buildings. The basilica was to contain neither of the holy places, but to stand in a great, rectangular, colonnaded yard five hundred feet long. To the east of it a separate, semicircular building was to enclose the tomb. It would require, in all, eighty columns, the architect explained, great quantities of marble and cedar-wood. He rather fancied he had hit off just what the Emperor had in mind. He had quite outdone the Lateran basilica.

But Macarius lacked vision of these future architectural glories. He had seen clearly enough the mourning women on the lonely hillside; he could not see the eighty columns. He saw only a parade ground cluttered with two incongruous protuberances, a

sort of hut and an empty pedestal. He was lost, far from home, in this wilderness of mensuration. What Hadrian had carelessly preserved, Constantine had zealously destroyed, it seemed to Macarius.

And now came news that the Empress Dowager was on her way to visit them.

"You see what you've done," said the Prefect. "I hope you're satisfied."

### *Epiphany*

Here, as elsewhere, little was known of the Empress Dowager. She was a golden legend. They expected someone very old and very luxurious; and they rather hoped, gentle. Instead they met a crank; and more than a crank, a saint. It was altogether too much. They were prepared to meet exorbitant demands for delicacies of the table and elaborate furniture. They had secured quite a passable orchestra from Alexandria. What Helena wanted was something of quite another order. She wanted the True Cross.

On the day of her arrival she made it clear that they had miscalculated. They went out to meet her, Bishop and Prefect and the whole city in a great cavalcade. They surrounded her litter with a massed choir and so led her to Government House. This was a nondescript huddle of buildings comprising the old Antonia Tower, part of Herod's palace and more recent military offices. Nothing very much could be done with the exterior but the upper rooms had been lavishly upholstered. Helena, alighting, seemed to regard the place critically. The major-domo—imported with the band from Egypt—tried to put a good face on it by remarking that this was originally Pilate's Praetorium. It might have been. No one was quite sure. On the whole most people thought that it was, though certainly much altered. Helena was plainly impressed. The major-domo went further. These marble steps, he explained, were the identical stairway which Our Lord had descended on his way to death. The effect was beyond his expectation. The aged empress knelt down, there and then in her travelling cloak, and painfully and prayerfully climbed the twenty-eight steps on her knees. More than this, she made the whole of her suite follow her example. Next day she

ordered her private cohort of sappers to take the whole staircase to pieces, number them, crate them and pack them on waggons. "I am sending it to Pope Sylvester," she said. "A thing like this ought to be in the Lateran. You clearly do not attach proper importance to it here."

Then, having rendered Government House uninhabitable, she bade her court find billets where they could, and herself settled in a single small room among the nuns of Mount Zion where she did her own housework and took her turn in waiting at table.

The Holy Stairs left for the coast in a train of waggons. Macarius and his chapter watched them go aghast. Royal collectors had been known to strip whole provinces of their works of art. The Church of Jerusalem had unique treasures—the crown of thorns, the lance, the shroud and many others. Were they to lose now, in the hour of liberation, what they had guarded so devotedly through all the years of persecution? They conferred and decided to make one great present. They would thus at the same time express their loyalty to the throne and emphasize their right of possession in all they had. They gave Helena the Holy Coat, which a soldier won at dice and sold later to a disciple. The Empress was grateful but it was not what she really wanted. She wanted one thing only. Meanwhile she set a squad to work loading some tons of common earth. The fancy had taken her to build a church in Rome at the Sessorian Palace and to lay its foundations in the soil of the Holy Land. Macarius watched this operation without alarm.

It was soon evident that the Empress's change of address did not presage a regime of pious seclusion. The old lady was out and about everywhere, every day. She rode to Bethlehem. Here a small Christian community had charge of the cave of the Nativity. They used it for Mass and had built a little meeting-house over its entrance. Hither at Christmas all the Christians of Jerusalem came with their Bishop to keep the vigil. "Just the place for a basilica," said Helena, and, behold, in a few weeks the work began. She started, too, to build on Olivet. This, they told her, was a family estate of Saint Joachim and Saint Ann. Old trees grew here whose fruits they had enjoyed. Here was their family burial-place. Our Lady had played here as a child and here her body had briefly lain, shrouded and anointed. Here lay the gardens where Jesus had resorted and the cave where he had taken shelter often with



the apostles; here he had passed the night in agony before his arrest, and hence he had ascended to Heaven. It was as holy a place as any in Jerusalem. "Just the place for a basilica."

Helena visited the sites often, saw the first trenches cut and picnicked among her foundations. And Macarius saw his little diocese growing vast in wealth and importance and fading from his recognition, as Dracilianus reduced everything to symmetry and covered the rough, the real stone with panels of marble.

It was like a masque of oriental magic, this utterance of a spell, this materialization from the clouds of domes and colonnades. Helena said the word, the complex machinery of imperial engineering was set into motion and she returned to help wash dishes in the convent scullery. It was, rather, a part of all that preternatural fecundity that surrounded her; of that Second Spring of unfailing clemency, when the seed germinated overnight, struck deep root and by noon threw up strong stems and a waving cumulus of flower and foliage. The multivarious harvest spiced the air and brought balm to her fretful hours. For she was fretful at times because she sought something quite different; not the budding sapling but old, seasoned wood.

She went about her quest with a single mind, questioning everyone. There were timber merchants in the town who had come there with tenders for new work, many of them local firms who had been in the business for generations. None of them, however, claimed any experience in the matter of making gallows. They were quite willing to try they said. What sort of wood was used for crosses three hundred years ago? It was a question they had not considered. The district was well wooded then, as now, they said. You could take your pick. All agreed, with professional assurance, that there was nothing like sound timber for endurance. All could quote instances of woodwork which had outlived concrete and masonry. "Only gets the harder with age, ma'am," they declared. "No reason why it shouldn't last for ever provided it isn't burnt and the insects don't get at it. There aren't many insects in these parts but there's been a power of burning."

She sent for historians and antiquaries. Some had already arrived in the town, hearing of the Empress's foible. Others came at her invitation from Alexandria and Antioch, Christian, Jewish and heathen, all eager to help.

The Christians were full of information. "It is generally believed," a Coptic elder assured her, "that the cross was compounded of every species of wood so that all the vegetable world could participate in the act of redemption."

"Oh nonsense," said Helena.

"Of course," said the Copt, highly delighted. "So I have always maintained. That is to put a complexion altogether too naturalistic and quantitative on the matter."

"Why must the vegetable world participate in this act, please?" asked a young clergyman from Italy. "It was in no way redeemed or susceptible of redemption."

"Surely, the mere carpentry of such a cross," said simple Macarius, whom Helena liked to have at hand on these occasions, "would have been so elaborate as to take many years? Some specimens of wood are known to come only from the forests far in the south of Africa and some from India."

"Exactly," said the Copt. "I have proved that the truth is much more simple. One arm was of boxwood, one of cypress, one of cedar and one of pine. These four woods symbolize . . ."

Another clergyman maintained the wood was aspen and that it was for this reason that the tree now continually shivered with shame. "Rot," said Helena.

A story still more elaborate was propounded by a swarthy scholar from the Upper Nile. When Adam was ill, he explained, his son Seth went to Paradise for some Oil of Mercy. The Archangel Michael gave him instead three seeds which arrived too late to save Adam from death. Seth put them in the corpse's mouth and from them grew three rods which Moses later came to possess. He employed them for a variety of magical purposes, including the blanching of negroes, until in David's day they turned into a single tree. (Here Helena began to show signs of impatience.) Solomon cut the tree down and tried to use it in the roof of the temple but it would not fit any purpose. A lady named Maximilla sat on it accidentally and her clothes burst into flame, so Solomon whipped Maximilla to death and used the wood as a foot-bridge which the Queen of Sheba, crossing, at once detected.

"Oh, do stop," said Helena. "It's just this kind of story that I've come to disprove."

"There's a great deal more," said the darky, reproachfully. "At the end it floats up in the middle of the pool of Bethesda."

"Bosh," said Helena.

The Jews, Alexandrians of deep scholarship, showed more caution. Crucifixion, they remarked, was a Roman barbarity, quite alien to best Jewish tradition. Their people, quite properly, stoned malefactors. The Gabaonites, indeed, had crucified the seven descendants of Saul, but that was in most exceptional circumstances—to make the barley grow—and very long ago. At the period which interested the Empress such a thing could not have occurred. She must really consult the Roman military historians.

One such was present. He said that pine was the cheapest wood and the easiest to work. No doubt that was what was used. Probably the upright was a more or less permanent fixture. The beam which the victim carried to his execution would be the cross-piece, which would be hoisted, with him hanging, to a socket and bolted into place. The same cross was no doubt used countless times.

Here the Jews interposed. That was not possible, they said. The execution was a Roman action but it had taken place on Jewish soil at the time when Jewish law was still paramount. And the law was perfectly clear on the subject. Anything connected with a violent death was unclean and liable to contaminate the neighbourhood. Instruments of execution, even if only the litter of a stoning or the bloodless cord of a strangulation, had to be cleared away, right out of sight, that very day.

Well, whose business would that be?

The temple guards, said the Roman. Romans did not concern themselves with ritual observances of that sort.

The friends and family of the victim, said the Jews. In this case, apparently, they had been given charge of the body—a most unusual provision. No doubt all arrangements had been left to them.

The soldiers, said the Christians. It had been no ordinary execution. The city was in turmoil. There had been alarming portents. Special precautions were taken to seal and guard the tomb. Special precautions would have been taken to dispose of all relics.

Anyway, said the Roman, it was just one of those baffling little



lacunae that occur in history, sacred or secular, and are never filled. There was no means now of learning precisely what happened then.

But in spite of all expert discouragement, Helena held to her purpose.

Macarius spoke little at these conferences. When they were over Helena sought his opinion. He gave it diffidently.

It was certainly not the disciples who had hidden the cross, he said. Had they done so, the memory would have been preserved in the lore of his church. Nothing had ever been known about the cross. That he could vouch for. Jew or Roman, who had hidden it, died with the secret.

"Very well," said Helena. "Let us argue from there. A party is detailed, temple guards or legionaries—we don't know which—to get rid of two large baulks of timber, quickly and unobtrusively. What do they do? Clearly they don't attract attention or waste time by carrying them far. The ground all round is rocky. They could not dig a trench big enough to hide them. What do they look for? A cave or the cellar of a ruined house—something like that. The place is full of them. Wherever I've been, I've seen them. All we have to do is to search all the hiding-places of that kind round Calvary and we are bound to find it."

"My dear Lady," said Macarius, "Your Majesty, ma'am. Have you studied the ground round Calvary?"

"Not very much. It's always been so full of builders and people."

"Exactly. Come and look now."

They went together to the East end of the site where the rising ground afforded a general view of the workings. It was near sundown and the men were packing up for the day. At their feet lay the flat waste space with its two little lumps, fenced and covered in sacking. All over the site the first beginnings of walls and piers, and beyond it and round it for many times its area stretched the outworks. There was the rubble and rock which had been cleared away; there was the building stone and marble which had been assembled; there were brick kilns and lime kilns and concrete mixers; there were huge wooden cranes; waggons and hand-carts; the stables of draught horses and the barracks of the labourers; field kitchens and latrines; drawing office and book-keeper's office; the guarded strong room where

the pay was kept; there were the shells of houses evacuated and half-demolished and the shells of temporary houses under construction. There was a network of causeways and cuttings; there was a whole street of booths where hucksters had set up shop to catch the men on pay-day before they reached the market. All this had been brought into being by the words: "Let's have a basilica."

In time, no doubt, order and reverence would return, so Macarius thought, but as he stood beside the Empress and showed her what was being done, he merely said: "Do you really think that in all this you will be able to find a hole in the ground and a piece of wood?"

"Oh yes, I think so," said Helena cheerfully.

Everyone in Jerusalem remarked on Helena's vigour. The old lady was positively indefatigable they all said. But in truth she was very weary. Winter set in. The convent was exposed, damp and chill. It was not thus, in Dalmatia, that she had planned her old age. She seemed to have come to an end of her questions. No one was helpful. No one was hopeful. At Christmas she had not the strength to ride out with the procession to Bethlehem. She went to Communion in the convent chapel and that day allowed the nuns to make a fuss of her, spending the feast crouched over a wood fire which they lit for her in her room.

But by Twelfth Night she rallied and on the eve set out by litter along the five rough miles to the shrine of the Nativity. There was no throng of pilgrims. Macarius and his people kept Epiphany in their own church. Only the little community of Bethlehem greeted her and led her to the room they had prepared. She rested there dozing until an hour before dawn when they called her and led her out under the stars, then down into the stable-cave, where they made a place for her on the women's side of the small, packed congregation.

The low vault was full of lamps and the air close and still. Silver bells announced the coming of the three vested, bearded monks, who like the kings of old now prostrated themselves before the altar. So the long liturgy began.

Helena knew little Greek and her thoughts were not in the words nor anywhere in the immediate scene. She forgot even her quest and was dead to everything except the swaddled child long

ago and those three royal sages who had come from so far to adore Him.

"This is my day," she thought, "and these are my kind." Perhaps she apprehended that her fame, like theirs, would live in one historic act of devotion; that she too had emerged from a kind of *οὐροπία* or nameless realm and would vanish like them in the sinking nursery fire-light among the picture-books and the day's toys.

"Like me," she said to them, "you were late in coming. The shepherds were here long before; even the cattle. They had joined the chorus of angels before you were on your way. For you the primordial discipline of the heavens was relaxed and a new defiant light blazed amid the disconcerted stars.

"How laboriously you came, taking sights and calculating, where the shepherds had run barefoot! How odd you looked on the road, attended by what outlandish liveries, laden with such preposterous gifts!

"You came at length to the final stage of your pilgrimage and the great star stood still above you. What did you do? You stopped to call on King Herod. Deadly exchange of compliments by which the reign of peace began in bloodshed and there began that unended war of mobs and magistrates against the innocent!

"Yet you came, and were not turned away. You too found room before the manger. Your gifts were not needed, but they were accepted and put carefully by for they were brought with love. In that new order of charity that had just come to life, there was room for you, too. You were not lower in the eyes of the holy family than the ox or the ass.

"You are my especial patrons," said Helena, "and patrons of all late-comers, of all who have a tedious and uncertain journey to make to the truth, of all who are confused with useless knowledge and speculation, of all who through politeness make themselves partners in guilt, of all who stand in danger by reason of their power and talent.

"Dear cousins, pray for me," said Helena, "and for my poor overloaded son. May he, too, before the end find kneeling-space in the straw. Pray for the great, lest they perish utterly. And pray for Lactantius and Marcias and the young poets of Trèves and for the souls of my wild, blond ancestors; for their sly foe Odysseus and for the great Longinus.

"For His sake who did not reject your curious gifts, pray always for all the learned, the oblique, the delicate. Let them not be quite forgotten at the throne of God when the simple come into their kingdom."

### *Ellen's Invention*

Presently with the passing weeks the builders worked under a milder sky and cyclamen unfolded in the surrounding hills. But Helena took no comfort in the return of spring; she had come to the end of all her questions.

Lent suited her mood better. It was a season not yet standardized in its austerity. At Jerusalem, where they kept holiday on Saturday as well as on Sunday, there were eight five-day weeks of fasting. And when Macarius said "fast" he meant quite simply "starve." Other dioceses indulged in mitigations—wine, oil, milk, little snacks of olives and cheese—which allowed the faithful to maintain a state of continuous rabbit-like nibbling. In Jerusalem if a man wished to attain the rewards of fasting he lived on water and thin gruel and nothing else. Some kept the full five days on this fare; many took Wednesdays off and dined heavily; others, weaker still, dined on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It was left to each to judge his own capacity. But if he did fast, he must fast thoroughly; that was Macarius's rule.

Helena was exempt by her age from all obligation. Nevertheless she decided to fast. It seemed to her a matter of practical expediency. Her interrogations had come to nothing. She had exhausted all the natural means of finding what she sought. "Very well," she said, "I'll see what fasting will do."

The nuns vainly begged her to consider her health. They did so with good reason for as the weeks slowly passed she grew weak and sometimes lightheaded. When Saturdays and Sundays came she had no inclination to eat much. By the beginning of Holy Week she was barely recognizable as the formidable woman who had cross-examined the archaeologists.

Palm Sunday was a day of heavy trial. Mass at dawn, a procession to Olivet, a whole day moving about the hillside from one holy place to another. Finally they re-enacted the entry into Jerusalem, Macarius walking on a leaf-strewn path, back to the sepulchre for vespers. At the end of that day Helena was too

weary to eat the supper the convent had prepared, but crept instead shivering to bed.

All building stopped for Holy Week. The whole Christian population gave themselves up to devotions which became daily more strenuous. On Thursday evening there was another procession to and around Olivet. Helena followed the routine resolutely on foot, the candle firm in her hand but with a mind which often grew dizzy and blank among the lections and psalmody. They ended the night in Gethsemane where the gospel was sung recounting the agony and the arrest of Christ. At the final words the whole multitude burst into lamentation, part customary, part spontaneous, a great swell of wailing and groaning. The candles were all out now and day just breaking. The sad procession shuffled back through the gates of the city to begin the long obsequies on the site of Calvary.

At the end of the Good Friday office Helena withdrew in solitude to her room. The tragedy was over. The stone had been rolled across the mouth of the tomb. The disciples had slunk away each with his woe and shame. Pilate slept sound. After all the alarms of the day the city lay silent as the dead god in his shroud. All Helena's full heart was with the bereaved women of long ago.

The nuns brought her some gruel which she left untasted. They whispered about her, the feverish fixed look of her eye, the trembling of all her limbs. One of them brought her a syrop of opium and this she accepted. She had slept little in the past week. Now she lay quite relaxed at last, like the body in the tomb.

All her life Helena's sleep had been full of dreams and always, daily, even on the far-off hunting mornings of her youth, she opened her eyes on a scene of loss; her waking heart momentarily drawn tight with the pain of leave-taking; then swiftly eased. Now on the most desolate night of the year there came to her, as though she were waking to clear day rather than, as was the case, sinking into deeper sleep, a dream that she knew was of God.

She dreamed she was up and about, alone in the lane which skirted the wall of Solomon's Temple. The place was no longer thronged as it always was by day nor cloudy with dust, but quite empty and silent and brilliant as a mountain peak. Helena knew she was young again and gaily greeted a man who approached



up the lane as though he had been one of her father's subjects and she riding out to hunt. When he answered "Good morning, miss," the words seemed natural and proper on that timeless morning.

He seemed middle-aged and was dressed and bearded like an orthodox Jew.

"You have come to lament at the Temple wall?"

"Not me, lady. You mustn't judge me by these togs. I only put them on once in a while when I come here to see how the old place is getting along. I've been abroad a long time, travelling all over the place. It's broadened my mind. They're a narrow lot the Jews you meet round here. I ought to know. I was one of them once. Had a little shop just down that street. Not much of a place, but I might never have moved if it hadn't been for the Romans busting the place up. Believe me, lady, I'm grateful to them."

Helena knew that this day of their meeting was marked on no calendar. "You must be very old," she said.

"I'll say I am. You'd never guess how old."

She looked hard at him and saw that on this morning of renewal he had no youth. His skin was smooth as basalt, his hair barely tinged with grey; his body was stocky and robust but for all his cheerful impudence of speech his eyes were weary and cold as a crocodile's. "First it was old Titus who bust it up. All my business ruined. I built it up again bit by bit. Then more troubles. Everything bust up again. Well, I'd had enough that time. Twice was too often for yours truly. So I took to my travels and since then I've had my ups and downs but I've never looked back. I dress like this when I'm here because that's my way. I always make a point of doing what's done wherever I am. I've worn yellow trousers in Bordeaux and wolf skins in Germany. You should see me in Persia at the court. Adaptability—that's the secret of a personal business like mine.

"I'm in incense, see. There's no finer connexion. All the leading shrines are on my books. They know I handle the right stuff. Buy it myself in Arabia, ship it myself. Besides, they all like dealing with me because I'm reverent, see. Whatever it is they worship—monkeys, snakes; I've seen some pretty queer goings-on in Phrygia, I can tell you—I always respect religion. It's my bread and butter.

"It's a very particular trade mine. You have to keep your ears open, especially these days when there's always some new cult starting; some new temple going up. That's why I'm here today. They were talking about Jerusalem in the bazaars in the Hadramaut, how the Romans were putting up a new temple here—to the Galilean of all people. That took me back a bit. Took me back three hundred years to be exact. Why it's all on account of the Galilean that I'm here today."

"You knew him?"

"Well, in a manner of speaking, no. I was thick with the Sanhedrin at the time. It wouldn't have been good for business to get mixed up with the Galilean in those days. How things change!

"He came right past the shop the day he was executed. Stumbled just on my door-step. He was all in. They had to get a man to help with the cross after that. Mind you, I didn't hold with crucifying him. Live and let live, I say. Still I couldn't have him there on my door-step, could I, so I moved him on quick. 'Come on,' I said, 'none of that now. This is no place for the likes of you.' He just looked at me, not exactly a nasty look, but as if he wanted to be sure of knowing me again. Then he said: 'Tarry till I come.' It didn't sound much at the time but I've thought about it a lot since and believe me, lady, I've had plenty of time to think. I wasn't fifty at the time and from that day to this I've never felt a day older. Queer, isn't it? You'd think I'd know everything about religion, seeing the business I'm in, but I don't. There are still things I find queer.

"I stopped counting birthdays after the hundred and fiftieth. Up till then it was rather exciting seeing everyone else dying off. Then somehow I lost interest. No one would believe me and, anyway, they wouldn't be happy doing business with a man of my age. They'd think I knew too much. One loses count of everything after a time. Women first; even money in the end."

"Tell me more about that day."

"I didn't like it," said the business man. "To be quite frank, I didn't like it at all. It got dark. There was an earthquake—nothing much, but coming on top of everything else it made people jittery. They said they saw ghosts. It was a very queer sort of day. No business. After a time I locked up the shop and went to see what was going on, but by the time I arrived it was all over. They were taking the bodies down."

As they talked the Empress and the business man walked up the lane to the place where the basilica was being built. "Think of it. All this money being spent on him after all this time. That's what makes my business so interesting—always a surprise."

"What happened to the cross?" asked Helena.

"Oh they threw those away, all three of them. They had to, you know, by law."

"Where did they put them? Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"I want that cross."

"Yes, come to think of it I expect there'll be quite a demand for anything to do with the Galilean now that he's suddenly become so popular and respectable."

"Could you show me where it is?"

"I reckon so."

"I am rich. Tell me your price."

"I wouldn't take anything from you, lady, for a little service like that. I shall get paid all right, in time. You have to take a long view in my business. How I see it, this new religion of the Galilean may be in for quite a run. A religion starts, no one knows how. Soon you get holy men and holy places springing up everywhere, old shrines change their names, there's apparitions and pilgrimages. There'll be ladies wanting other things besides the cross. All one wants is to get the thing started properly. One wants a few genuine relics in thoroughly respectable hands. Then everyone else will follow. There won't be enough genuine stuff to meet the demand. That will be my turn. I shall get paid. I wouldn't take anything from you now, lady. Glad to see you have the cross. It won't cost you a thing."

Helena listened and in her mind saw, clear as all else on that brilliant timeless morning, what was in store. She saw the sanctuaries of Christendom become a fair-ground, stalls hung with beads and medals, substances yet unknown pressed into sacred emblems; heard a chatter of haggling in tongues yet unspoken. She saw the treasuries of the Church filled with forgeries and impostures. She saw Christians fighting and stealing to get possession of trash. She saw all this, considered it and said: "It's a stiff price"; and then: "Show me the cross."

"They threw it in an old underground cistern," said the business man. "One just outside the gate. A big place down some



steps. It used to be the main water supply for this end of the city but it dried up for some reason years before."

"Where?"

Without hesitation the Jew led her to the western edge of the new platform and beyond it among the heaped-up rubble.

"It's hard to tell exactly," he said. "They've altered the place so much."

He took a sight through his weary, knowing eyes at the two fixed points in that scene of change—the tomb and the summit of Golgotha. He judged the distance carefully and at length dug in a heel. "Dig here," he said. "You won't be far out. Dig till you come on the steps."

Then Helena awoke and found that she was an old woman, alone and slightly drugged, in the dark. She lay waiting for the dawn with prayers of hope and thankfulness.

When it was light she went to the sepulchre. People were already assembling for the first office of Holy Saturday. She was a familiar figure there and excited no comment.

She followed the path she had taken in her dream, climbed the heap and stood where she had stood with the business man. Where she had seen him set his heel there was a print on the dust that looked as though it had been left by a goat's hoof. Helena gently rubbed it out and set in its place her own mark, a little cross of pebbles.

The new excavation was begun immediately after Easter. Helena came down to watch the work and herself ceremoniously filled the first basket of rubble. Her command was absolute but no one on the site welcomed this interruption of the routine. To the clerk-of-the-works there seemed no limit to the delays this whimsical old lady might impose and even the labourers were resentful. It might be thought that it was nothing to them, sweating and straining to order, eyes on the ground, what they were doing or why. But the work had reached a stage when it was intelligible; the plan of the massive walls was clear, and the men had begun to feel pride in their share of this historic undertaking. Now they were called off to shift the rubble they had themselves laboriously deposited; to look for a dry reservoir. There was grumbling in the barrack-rooms and in the drawing-office. Bishop Macarius, too, was sad to see the confusion further

prolonged; the return to regular worship further postponed. Nevertheless, the work was done, not cheerfully but with Roman method and discipline.

They were digging the lower, westward slope of the hill of Golgotha. Under their own new rubbish they found great masses of old masonry from the city wall that had been thrown down there. Under the masonry lay the original rock and there, just where Helena had pointed, they came on the steps and the low arch where in the time of the Maccabees women had come to fill their pitchers and caravans had paused to water before entering the city. The entrance was blocked to the roof and here, on Helena's orders, pick and spade were put away and wooden shovels issued which would do less injury to the wood, if they struck it. The rubbish was scrutinized as it went into the baskets and any fragment of timber carefully set aside. In this way they worked their way slowly deeper until, towards the end of April, to the surprise of all except Helena they came to the reservoir. Torch-light showed them a large ruinous cellar, littered waist-deep with the detritus of fallen vaulting. This seemed the chamber they sought and the whole gang became at once eager and interested. Helena had an ivory chair carried down and there she sat, attended by one nun, hour by hour in the flare and smoke and dust, watching the men at work.

It took many days. The roof threatened to subside and they worked like miners propping it as they advanced. Basketful by basketful the rubbish was carried away, sifted and tipped. Helena sat on her little throne watching and praying. Two days before the end it became evident that there was nowhere now where the large timbers she sought could be concealed. But she showed no dismay. When at length the whole chamber was clear and swept and quite empty, Helena sat on, praying.

The nun said: "Don't you think, ma'am, that perhaps we ought to go home?"

"Why? We have not found what we came for."

"But, ma'am, it isn't here. You can't always trust dreams, you know. Some are sent by the devil."

"My dream was all right."

The clerk-of-the-works came to ask permission to dismiss the workmen. "It is already quite dark outside," he said.

"That makes no difference down here."

"But, ma'am, what is there for them to do?"

"Search."

The old lady rose from her chair and attended by the linkman made a slow inspection of the vault. At the south-west corner she tapped with her cane on the wall.

"Look at this," she said. "There's been a door here and someone botched it up in a hurry."

The clerk-of-the-works examined the corner. "Yes," he said, "there certainly seems to have been something here."

"I think I can guess whose work this was. After the stone had been rolled back from the tomb the High Priests made sure nothing else was going to escape. In my country we call that locking the stable door after the horse has been stolen."

"Yes, ma'am. That is a most interesting speculation. Perhaps tomorrow . . ."

"I don't leave this cellar until I've seen what's the other side of that wall," said Helena. "Call for volunteers. We only want a small gang on this job. And see that they're all Christians. We don't want any heathen around at a time like this."

So Helena stayed in prayer while the wall was broken down. It was a simple task and when it fell the stones went rolling away down into the darkness out of sight. This passage was steep and quite clear of rubbish. The men stood back in hesitation.

"Go on," said Helena. "You'll find a cross in there. Perhaps more than one. Bring them up carefully. I will stay here. I've a few more prayers to say."

The little torch-lit party disappeared. Helena heard their cautious, stumbling steps descend, grow faint and presently return.

The leading torch-bearer appeared at the entrance, after him two men carrying a baulk of timber.

"There are several more bits, ma'am."

"Bring them all up. Lay them here. The Bishop shall see them in the morning. Give these men a lot of money," she said rather dizzily to the clerk-of-the-works. "Set a guard on the wood." And taking the nun by the hand seeking support and guidance she said: "So it is finished."

Next day, the 3rd of May, Bishop Macarius and Helena examined her finds. They were laid out on the pavement of the new basilica and comprised in order of importance the members

of three crosses, detached but well-preserved, a notice board split into two, four nails and a triangular block of wood. Half the notice board which bore, ill-scrawled in the three great tongues of the ancient world, the supreme title, was still attached to one of the taller posts.

"So we can be quite certain about *that* one," said Helena briskly.

Now that her quest was at last accomplished all sentiment was dead and she was as practical about arrangements as though some new furniture had been delivered at her house.

"The nails go with the Holy Cross," she decided, "and that I take to be a foot-rest."

"Very likely, ma'am."

"Now for the cross-beams. We must see which belongs to which. Get one of the carpenters. He ought to be able to help."

But the carpenter said there was no way of knowing. It was a rough job anyway. Nothing fitted. "God alone knows," he said, "which piece is supposed to fit where."

"Then God will show us," said Helena.

"Your highness, ma'am, dear lady," said Macarius. "You really must not expect miracles every day."

"Why not?" said Helena. "There wouldn't be any point in God giving us the cross if he didn't want us to recognize it. Find someone ill, very ill," she said, "and try the cross beams on him."

It worked, as everything had worked for Helena on this remarkable tour. The beams were carried up to the room of a dying woman and laid one at a time beside her on the bed. Two made no difference. The third effected a complete recovery.

"So now we know," said Helena.

Then she set about the division of the property. Half was for Macarius; half for the rest of the world. She took the cross-beam of the True Cross and left him the upright. She gave him the part of the Title which was inscribed in Hebrew. All four nails she set aside for Constantine. The triangular block of wood was of more doubtful value. It might be the suppedaneum if a suppedaneum had been used. On the other hand it might just be a block of wood. But she added it to her baggage and gave boundless pleasure later by presenting it to the uncritical Cypriots. The other crosses proved to be indistinguishable. One belonged to the repentant thief, one to his blaspheming fellow; but which was which?

Patients less gravely afflicted, people even with minor nervous troubles, were successively paraded, touched with the wood and sent away quite unrelieved. Only a Briton could have solved the problem as Helena did. Calling to the carpenter she ordered him to split all four pieces and to construct a composite pair of crosses each of which should comprise a half of each original. When this was done she gave one to Macarius and retained the other.

Meanwhile the beacons blazed news of the discovery to the capital and post-horsemen carried it throughout Christendom. The Deums were sung in the imperial basilicas. No one who watched that day while the Empress calmly divided her treasure, could have discerned her joy. Her work was finished. She had done what only the saints succeed in doing; what indeed constitutes their patent of sanctity. She had completely conformed to the will of God. Others a few years back had done their duty gloriously in the arena. Hers was a gentler destiny, merely to gather wood. That was the particular, humble purpose for which she had been created. And now it was done. So with her precious cargo she sailed joyfully away.

She sailed away, out of authentic history. Fishermen in the Adriatic say that she came there and when her galley was threatened with wreck, calmed the raging sea by throwing into it one of the sacred nails, since when those waters have always been kind to sailors.

The fishermen of Cyprus say that she performed this act off their own dangerous shore in the Gulf of Satalia. She then landed, all Cypriots agree, and found the island dying of a drought that had lasted seventeen years. Since Catherine was martyred it had not rained in Cyprus. The ground was all baked and bare; the enterprising had left and found new homes abroad. All who were left of that once teeming population had grown brutal with hardship and murdered travellers who were cast up there on the supposition that they were Jews. Demons haunted the island and possessed it during the hours of darkness so that it was impossible to bury the dead who, as soon as they were decently covered, were disinterred and thrown back putrefying on their old doorsteps.

For these people Helena set up one of the composite crosses of the thieves and at once the drought broke so that she was obliged to build a bridge, which may still be seen, in order to pass what,



when she arrived, had been a dry gulley. She sawed up the suppedaneum, if suppedaneum it was, and made two little crosses of it, which she gave the islanders and at once the demons left, gyring up in a noisy flock until they dwindled to the size of starlings and were lost in the upper air. Then she summoned a new population from the neighbouring islands, mainly from Telos, and settled them on the now fertile land. The cross which she left was put up in a church where it hovered, without support, for centuries, till the infidels took the island.

She continued her voyage, calling none knows where, for the people of those abandoned shores have taken her into their hearts and made her one with all great and beneficent ladies of myth and memory. In their poetry her cargo multiplied and was enriched with all the spoils of fairy-land.

At length she came to Constantine whom she found in his new city. Vast gimcrack ministries were rising about him with reckless speed. At the moment he was chiefly occupied with a monument to himself, a porphyry column of unprecedented height on a huge white pedestal. On the summit of this he purposed to erect the colossal bronze Apollo of Pheidias which he had lately imported from Athens. The holy nails arrived opportunely for Constantine had decapitated the great statue, poised a portrait of himself on the neck and was even at that moment supervising the construction of the halo which was to surmount the whole. One of the nails was set as a ray shining from the imperial cranium.

Constantine had lately become interested in relics. He had brought the Palladium itself from Rome and embedded it in the foundations of his monument.

"I'm glad you are starting with a part of Troy," said Helena. "Your grandfather Coel will be pleased."

"I've got plenty of other things just as important," said Constantine. "Such a bit of luck. Just when I was laying the foundation-stone a dealer turned up from Palestine with a first-class collection. Really important stuff. I bought the lot, of course. It included Noe's adze—the very one he used on the ark—and Mary Magdalen's alabaster box and all sorts of things."

"And what have you done with them, my son?"

"They're all there, in the base of the column. Nothing will ever shake it now."

He was delighted with his nails. The second he stuck in his hat.

The third he put to a still more idiosyncratic use. He sent it to the smith and had it forged into a snaffle for his horse. When Helena heard this she was at first a little taken aback. But presently she smiled, giggled and was heard to utter the single, enigmatic word "stabularia."

Her strength was failing fast, and soon it became necessary for her to make her will. She disposed of everything in great detail, sending the Holy Coat to her old home at Trèves, a great piece of the Cross and the Title to her new church in the Sessorian Palace, dividing and dispersing her treasury so that no friends were forgotten. The bodies of the Magi, which had somewhere, somehow got into her luggage, she is thought to have sent to Cologne. At last she had emptied the whole cornucopia and there was nothing for her to leave except her own weary body. This Constantine wanted for his Church of the Apostles where the cenotaphs stood in a great circle, all empty and without worship. But Helena had decided where she would lie and her last act was to bequeath herself to Rome. She died on August 18, 328. They carried her body to Rome and laid it in the sarcophagus Constantine had designed for himself, in the mausoleum he had built three miles out of the City on the road to Palestrina. There she lay undisturbed while Rheims and Constantinople disputed which possessed her until the reign of Pope Urban VIII. He moved her bones to the church of Ara Coeli where they lie to-day. It was within a few yards of her, on the steps of that church, that the apostate Gibbon later sat and premeditated his history.

Her many prayers seemed to receive unequal answers. Constantine was at long last baptized and died in the expectation of an immediate, triumphal entry to Paradise. Britain for a time became Christian, and 136 parish churches, mostly in the old lands of the Trinovantes, were dedicated to Helena. The Holy Places were alternately honoured and desecrated, lost and won, bought and bargained for throughout the centuries. But the wood endured. In splinters and shavings gorgeously encased it has travelled the world over and found worship among every race. To all mankind, confused with ancestral memories, prone to every aberration of symbol and speculation, it has brought the same blunt statement of fact, in which alone is hope.

# THE ORIGINS OF ITALIAN OPERA

By

SIMON TOWNELEY WORSTHORNE

“I NEVER could look on it in the light of a recreation to have my ears teased with measured noises,” said Mr. Casaubon when he was courting Dorothea Brooke. And yet, had he known that the *dramma in musica* was the result partly of researches into the literature of classical Greece, and had its roots in the antique religions, he would certainly have been less disparaging. Yet although we may guess at the methods of performing classical drama, we have no idea of the sound of its music. It is probable that the lines were declaimed. The *Camerati Bardi*, a group of Florentine enthusiasts in the late decades of the sixteenth century, believed this to be the case. And, although they made no pretence to imitate the sound of Greek music, they devoted much study to the relationship between metrical stresses and musical rhythms. “Si doveva imitar col canto chi parla,” Peri wrote in 1600.<sup>1</sup> Opera, in the sense of a drama acted with music and sung throughout by solo voices, can be said to date from the 1597 performance in Florence of *La Dafne* with music by Peri and words by Rinuccini. The music is lost but the libretto tells us that the opera consisted of a prologue and six scenes, whilst our earliest knowledge of the scores is from *L'Euridice*, by the same two, performed as part of the wedding celebrations in honour of Henri IV and Maria de' Medici in the Pitti Palace, 1600. Music and drama were closely associated many years before the experiments of the *Camerata*, and the roots of their connection, in Christian as in pagan times, are to be found in the *Sacre Rappresentazioni*, and in such ceremonies as the recitation of the Passion in the Holy Week services. But the literary influence of Italian pastoral and satirical poetry played an enormous part in shaping the modern operatic conventions. Politian's *Orfeo*, performed in

<sup>1</sup> Solerti, *Gli albori del melodramma*, 1904, vol. 2, p. 109, from Peri's preface to *Euridice*, Florence, 1600.





PLATE I

*Il Trionfo d'Augusto in Egitto*. Regio Teatro, Milan, 1672. Text Carlo Maria Maggi. Music unknown. Act II, 9. Padiglioni.



PLATE 2

*Il Bellerofonte*. Teatro Novissimo, Venice, 1642. Text Vincenzo Nolfi. Music Francesco Sacati. Act II, 3.



PLATE 3

*Germanico sul Reno*. Teatro San Salvatore, Venice, 1676. Text G. C. Corradi. Music Gio. Legrenzi. Machinery for the finale decorated.

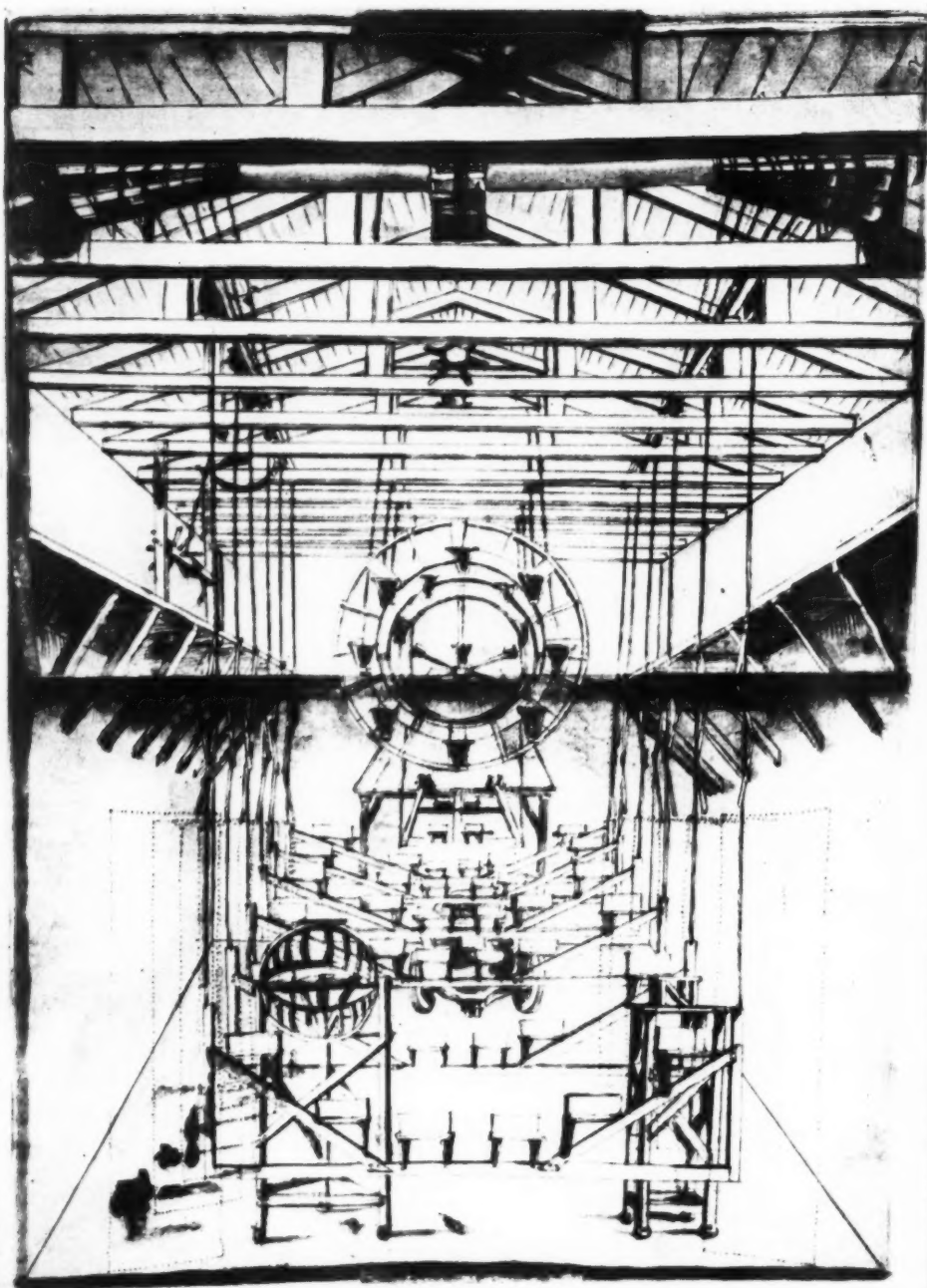


PLATE 4

*Germanico sul Reno*. Teatro San Salvatore, Venice, 1676. Text G. C. Corradi. Music Gio. Legrenzi. Machinery for the finale undecorated.

Mantua, 1471, has been placed at the "foundation of modern opera," and we know from the preface that Cinzio's tragedy *Orbecche* "was given in Ferrara at the house of the author in 1541. . . . Sebastiano Clavignano da Montefalco produced it. Alfonso dalla Viuola composed the music. Girolamo Carpi da Ferrara was scenic architect and painter."<sup>1</sup> Solerti, too, prints the music for a scene from Agostino Beccari's *Sacrificio*<sup>2</sup> also given in Ferrara, 1554, set by the same Alfonso dalla Viuola adding, "rappresentò il Sacerdote con la lira M. Andrea suo fratello." It is a rare example of very early monody. But in effect these performances were primarily literary and not particularly concerned with music as a means of intensifying a dramatic situation. That same year, it is worth while remembering, saw the publication of Palestrina's first book of masses, whilst Vecchi, the composer of the well-known madrigal opera *L'Amfiparnaso*, was only four years old. And, although it was common practice in the polyphonic period to illustrate the text literally, the music to descend at the mention of hell and to rise when singing of heaven, it cannot be said that composers considered music as a means of expressing an emotional state. The French anticipated the Italians with experiments in the relation between the metrical arrangement of words and musical rhythms. The Academy of Poetry and Music was founded in Paris, 1570, by Baïf and Thibaut de Courville: and Claude Lejeune, about the same time, was experimenting with "vers mesurés à l'antique."

But, in a sense, this is incidental to the actual development of opera. The interplay of stress and rhythm is not the distinguishing feature of musical drama, it is present in an equally complex relation in any form of solo or concerted singing and is, in fact, one of the most fascinating characteristics of madrigal composers. Of more importance for dramatic music is the theory of the affections so prominent in the seventeenth century. "La Musica è la dolcezza e quasi l'anima della Poesia," Tasso wrote. And it is this idea of a spirit impregnating the whole character of each piece that is best able to explain the theory. The affection of a piece, an aria or a suite movement, was fixed from the outset, and the entire movement was based upon it. Later the affection had a literary connotation and could only be understood with reference to it. Couperin's keyboard music, for example, is often

<sup>1</sup> Solerti, op. cit., vol. 1, intr. p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Solerti, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 1-6.



explained by the title which does not turn it into what we now call "programme" music; it is best explained as a series of musical patterns capable, as seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century text books show, of undergoing the tricks of inversion, diminution, imitation, etc., tricks which enable the composer to put across his ideas in a form capable of rational explanation. And it is partly this quality of abstraction that gave to music the particular attraction felt for it by such philosophers as Descartes and Leibnitz who, in fact, considered it as the "unconscious counting of the soul" based on mathematical principles. It was, like a scientific problem, demonstrable, a fact, unlike the pleasant fictions of poetry. The affection of a piece then had an active purpose. But the term affections was also used in a passive sense. The phrase "to move the affections" was very common amongst the early seventeenth-century musicians, and is synonymous with the exciting of the senses, not as in poetry by an appeal to the imagination, but by exciting actual physical reactions. Marco da Gagliano lays particular stress on the effect Peri's singing had on his audience from his peculiar manner of expressing the sense of the words, "for he gave them so well turned a grace and impressed on others [the audience] the effect of those words so that he had the power to make them weep or rejoice at will."<sup>1</sup> In this idea of the affections, then, there is a curious relationship between the intellect and the senses which in operatic music stands as the relationship between recitative and aria, and in stage design between the perspective and the machine. The requirements of an art such as opera are particularly suited to combine the two. "The opera is not, or should not be, else but a continual illusion of the soul: for the fashioning of it all the fine arts combine, each delighting one or other of the senses,"<sup>2</sup> as an eighteenth-century critic considered it. With the ultimately overwhelming victory of the aria the balance was destroyed; it became no longer a *favola in musica*, but a collection of songs to which the canons of dramatic construction were entirely subservient.

The problem was further enlarged as theorists considered the

<sup>1</sup> Solerti, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 68. "Però che egli dà loro una sì fatta grazia e di maniera imprime in altrui l'affetto de quelle parole, che è forza e piangere e rallegrarsi secondo che egli vuole."

<sup>2</sup> Arteaga, *Le rivoluzioni de teatro musicale italiano*, 1785, vol. 1, p. 40. "L'opera non è, o non dovrebbe essere, che un prestigio continuato dell'anima, a formare il quale tutte le belle arti concorrono, prendendo ciascuna a dilettere or l'un l'altro dei sensi."



relationship between Nature and the Ideal. It was essential to present things as they are. But it was equally essential not to offend against good taste. Angelo Ingegneri<sup>1</sup> stresses the need to represent the characters on the stage as consistent with their nationality in dress, custom and behaviour and, earlier, Ludovico Dolce speaks of his play *Marianna* given in Venice, 1563, as being "recitata con gli abiti, col canto e con gli ornamenti convenevoli." But even so we also come across warnings against too much attention to realism. It is important not only to imitate Nature but to exceed it. Dryden only echoes Italian art critics in the late sixteenth century by insisting that poetry and painting should be "not only true imitations of nature, but of the best Nature, of that which is brought up to a nobler pitch."<sup>2</sup> We find the sentiment constantly urged by such men as Ludovico Dolce himself and the great critic Agucchi.<sup>3</sup>

The development of this theory in music is most interesting and is the explanation of much that is otherwise illogical and senseless composition. The curious discords in example 1 can only be explained as a vivid expression of the mood or affection of the piece and in particular the words *angoscie* and *gemiti*. It



is taken from the opera *Il Medoro*, Act III, 22 by Luzzo, first performed in Venice, 1658, and is a form of lament in which the heroine weeps for the death, as she imagines, of her lover. It may be said that the extraordinary clashes in the first and fourth bars are an imitation of nature and the expression of torment and anguish. Such passages appear at other places, and the score of this opera is so carefully copied that we can rule out the possibility of an error in the MS. It is an entirely different technique to the imitative style of writing such as we find in madrigals, and is a development, to use Monteverdi's expression, of *la seconda*

<sup>1</sup> A. Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa*, 1598, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Dryden, *Essays*, ed. W. P. Ker, 1900, vol. 2, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> For a most illuminating study of its implications, on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century painting, see Denis Mahon, *Studies in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Art and Theory*, 1947.

*pratica*, or new style, which he himself employs, for example, in the well-known *Madrigali guerrieri, et amorosi* of 1638. The second example is a similar illustration taken from Cavalli's *Le nozze di Teti e di Peleo*, Act 1, 3, written for Venice, 1639. The gentle flow of the music is most apt for a scene in which Teti is quietly fishing seated in a sea-shell. There is nothing curious or complicated in this passage, nor should there be, since its aim is to convey an impression of a wholly delightful scene.



The same problem of the *verisimili* was present in the art of the scene designer. The classic example, still extant, of stage perspective is the *Teatro Olimpico* at Vicenza, planned by Palladio, completed by Scamozzi, and first opened in 1585. The aim of perspective is to create a pleasing illusion:

"Qu'il maudiroit le jour, où, son âme insensée  
Perdit l'heureux erreur qui charmoit sa pensée."<sup>1</sup>

And, as the eye travelled down the line of sight, the imagination was supposed to find nourishment in the idea of infinite space stretching out before it. The illusion created by the perspective freed the mind from servitude to the actual objects portrayed. The theory is developed in practice by the great stage craftsman Sabbattini in his *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne teatri* of 1637, in which he devotes one part to the perspective and the other to the machines and practical appurtenances of the stage, typifying the two concepts of the *verisimili*. Like the expressive music, the perspective creates an atmosphere, whereas the realistic props and machines are the means of ensuring accuracy of representation as urged by such men as Ingegneri.

<sup>1</sup> Arteaga, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 76-7.

Perspective is the rule in seventeenth-century stage design, and in the opera houses of Venice it received its greatest stimulus, both from the number of these theatres and from the number of different operas put on in the course of each season. Besides which, by the latter half of the century, Venice had become the centre of fashionable pleasure seekers. The Parisian *Mercur Galant*, for example, from 1676 onwards, contains special accounts of the performances there for the delight of its French readers. Its splendours were emulated throughout Europe. Torelli, for example, spent from 1644 to 1661 in Paris, and his work there is well-known.<sup>1</sup> However, too much importance should not be attached to designs of the late seventeenth century in tracing the development of perspective and machine. We must bear in mind that, splendid as these Venetian engravings of Torelli are, they were only extensions of an idea already common. The magnificent sets for Jacobean masques owe much to the instruction given to Inigo Jones by Alfonso and Giulio Parigi during his visit to Florence between 1596 and 1604, and before that Buontalenti, who himself taught the Parigi, had invented elaborate spectacles for the Medici court. In fact, the design in plate 1 from the Royal Theatre, Milan, 1672, is reminiscent of some of the sets by Jones, indicating a return to earlier practice, a modification of the rigid perspective used in Venice and elsewhere, as we know from the famous Torelli designs for *Bellerofonte* and *Venere Gelosa*, published in 1642, an example of which is given as plate 2. There is about the Milan set a more pastoral or rustic atmosphere reminiscent of sixteenth-century designs. The perspective, although the "central theme," is less blatant. And, indeed, we find in 1676, four years later, at present unique for the date,<sup>2</sup> an unsymmetrical set in *Germanico sul Reno*, produced in Venice, an antecedent of the familiar eighteenth-century practice.

In the same way, the machine, quite apart from its classical origins, was used in the most varied and elaborate form in the sixteenth century. Its widespread use has not been sufficiently emphasized. For example, machines aided by perspective were employed in the churches with magnificence equal to secular entertainments. Rinuccini wrote *versi sacri* for Holy Week services

<sup>1</sup> Prunières, *L'opéra italien en France avant Lulli*, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Tessier, "La décoration théâtrale à Venise," in *La Revue de l'Art ancien et moderne*, 1928, points out this fact.

for the Archduchess of Tuscany in 1619, the description of which is most illuminating as showing the close relation between the religious symbolism and the theatre—we have noticed it in connection with the *Sacre rappresentationi* earlier on. The dedication reads: "A sky shone above the altar which, on opening, disclosed a paradise which, from the perspective and distribution of lights, showed an infinite space filled by choirs of angels: a greater wonder had been seen in the same place a little while before on Thursday and Good Friday (not without mystery) during the ceremonies of the Forty Hours; there appeared a fountain from which poured a great quantity of water to make a sea from the shores of which Jacob's ladder arose into the sky contrived so that one could see the fall of the water, the waves of the sea and the angels descending and climbing. The shining splendour of the paradise was such as might excite wonder rather than description. I shall only say that it was the work of Giulio Parigi."<sup>1</sup> Such machines are very similar to that shown in plate 2 and the cloud effect and the machinery needed to support the *cori di Angeli* must have antedated plates 3 and 4 by fifty-seven years. A further point illustrative of the theatrical effect intended is made by the writer in describing the singer who had not only a voice of exquisite beauty "ma con gesti e movimenti sovraumani esprimeva le parole e concetti."

The foregoing account will have shown how cultivated the taste for the *dramma musicale* had become by 1637, when the first performance of *Andromeda* by Manelli was given in Venice. The opera itself was not different in quality from those lately put on in Rome at the Palazzo Barberini; in fact the company, under their producer the theorbo player Ferrari, had moved from Rome to the politically more stable atmosphere of Venice on the grounds of expediency rather than for artistic reasons. This date is important because it marks the opening of the first public opera house in which the performances were given to an audience who bought tickets. It was here, in fact, that opera became a business concern and, as recently discovered documents disclose, was developed by companies of Venetian nobles and impresarios much on the lines of modern ventures and at equal risk. Singers were engaged and sought from the different courts, composers and librettists were in constant demand: the latter were often

<sup>1</sup> Solerti, *Gli albori del melodramma*, vol. 2, p. 337.

noble amateurs and the situations chosen were thinly disguised descriptions of social life around them. The subjects were, in the main, no longer pastoral or developments of the Italian eclogue, but were taken more and more from Plutarch and other classical historians, or adapted from incidents in the epics of Ariosto and Tasso, whilst imaginary plots, involving Persian and middle eastern potentates, were often chosen as the basis for fiction. These plots were akin to the *capa y spada* style of Lope de Vega. The most famous adaptor of them was G. A. Cicognini, a Florentine librettist, whose play *Il Convitato di pietra* is, according to Belloni,<sup>1</sup> one of the earliest examples in Italian of the Don Giovanni legend.

In the music, too, there is a marked change in style at this time. The aria begins to dominate in the score and the *buffo* element takes a larger place: of this last, well-known and excellent examples can be seen in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. The most marked differences in Venice are the growth of the formal introduction and the development of the subtle distinctions in effect varying between the strictest *recitativo secco* and the most florid *da capo aria*, although some short prelude, either a call of trumpets or even a more complicated piece such as Marco da Gagliano composed for his *Dafne* in Mantua, 1608, had been customary at an earlier date. He writes, "Before the curtain drops, to make the audience attend, a *sinfonia* is sounded, composed for different instruments which serve to accompany the choruses and to play the *ritornellos*,"<sup>2</sup> a practice interesting to us for the reference to a curtain<sup>3</sup> and for its close parallel to the scheme of *ritornellos* used in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* of the previous year. The Venetian introductions followed no set pattern. In form they resemble what we now call an overture in the French style, since they open with a stately movement which may be followed by another in a quicker tempo. There are, in fact, some examples of *sinfonie*, as indeed they were called, divided into two parts, the second exactly like the first except to be played in double time. Others follow the suite form more closely and have actual indications for the tempo written in the

<sup>1</sup> Belloni, *Storia letteraria d'Italia, il seicento*, 1943, pp. 353-66.

<sup>2</sup> Solerti, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 69. "Innanzi al calar della tenda, per render attenti gli uditori, sonisti una sinfonia composta di diversi istrumenti quali servono per accompagnare i cori e sonare i ritornelli."

<sup>3</sup> The curtain at that time was either raised according to the modern practice or lowered on to the stage by means of pulleys, which could lift it when required.



score, *grave*, *affetuoso*, *presto*, *adagio*. But again there are numerous operas which appear from the score to open with no introduction at all. The orchestras themselves were small, strings and harpsichord with an occasional trumpet for martial scenes. That is explained by the number of theatres which were run in Venice. In 1678 there were eight major opera houses open. And the managers were no doubt sufficiently hard pressed financially to pay the singers their wages, to find the money for the elaborate sets, salaries for the stage hands and the upkeep of the house itself as well as to carry the additional burden of a sizeable orchestra. They gained an income from the sale of tickets and from the lease of the right to a box for the season. The rent of these boxes depended upon the tier in which they were situated. The owner had it as his own and was allowed to bequeath his right in his will. But, as is still the custom in Italy, a guest invited to the box himself paid some fee to the box office for his *ingresso*. In the pit were placed chairs, and at the back there was a free space for the *claque* of gondoliers. It must have been an extraordinary sight; the nobility masked in their boxes and the throng seated below, each with a little candle and a copy of the libretto, printed at the author's expense, although he was allowed the right to any profits from the sale. And, during the interval, sellers of cakes and sweetmeats perambulated the pit whilst servants collected the chair money. Yet the Government was insistent upon public order and, although no public officer entered the theatre in his official capacity, the buildings themselves were inspected periodically, advertisements of future operas were forbidden everywhere except at the Rialto and Piazzetta. And the Doge himself allotted boxes to foreign diplomats.

As we mentioned earlier, the second marked change in style is the development of the aria and its relation to the recitative. In its simplest form the aria is the poetical expression of the dramatic events in a particular scene. It takes up the recitative dialogue and dwells on the general and imaginative qualities therein expressed. Its original purpose was to provide a pause in the drama in which the tension engendered could be relieved in an outburst of song, a purpose almost analogous to the Greek chorus. "Such a situation belongs to the aria which, considered in this philosophical aspect, is nothing but the conclusion, the epilogue, or the epiphenomenon of the passion. . . . If the character does not make a decision but remains in doubt, as sometimes happens, then the aria comes to be a way out, an escape for the



emotion."<sup>1</sup> This opinion, written late in the eighteenth century, expresses the fully developed idea which had had its most famous critic in Gluck. The custom had become in Venice, as librettos show, absurd even in the late seventeenth century. For in these plots, the arias are not the culmination of a dramatic situation, but are so closely packed into a weakly constructed plot that they petrify the action. The early operas show a more subtle balance. The plot itself is conducted in *recitativo secco* but, for particularly emotional lines, the music takes on an *arioso* style, lapsing quickly back into recitative. The voice might, at times of particular stress, be accompanied by instruments, not with the formality of an aria accompaniment but in free style which came to an end the moment the tension eased. Such moments were to be found in the middle of long passages of monologue. The arias themselves, for the most part unaccompanied, except for *continuo*, were musical settings of several stanzas in regular metre and with a definite rhyming scheme or else they were simply examples of the *da capo* form, in which instruments and voice answer each other in short phrases. An ingenious librettist provided lines suitable for every different style, whereas his less inventive colleague was content to give a jingle to each character as he left the stage in order to insure applause from an audience desirous of hearing nothing but the melodies of their favourite "stars."

To the same cause, perhaps, to which we have attributed the size of the orchestra we may refer the lack of choruses in these operas. A producer might spend a sum on extras for crowd scenes, but could choose them at random, whereas a chorus required more careful selection and more generous payment. But the virtual absence of concerted pieces for the principal characters must be assigned to the gradual domination of individual singers who cared only for their own reputation. And the audience, unlike Mr. Casaubon, required that not only its ears but each of the senses should be teased again and again. "It is certain," writes Muratori, "that modern theatrical music is highly injurious to the habits of the people, who become more base and sometimes lascivious for the hearing of it."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arteaga, op. cit., vol. I, p. 28. "Cotal situazione è la propria dell'aria, la quale considerata sotto questo filosofico aspetto non è altro che la conclusione, l'epilogo o epifanema della passione. . . . Che se il personaggio non si risolve, ma rimane nelle sue dubbiezza, come tal volta adviene, allora l'aria dovrà essere come un uscita, una scappata del sentimento."

<sup>2</sup> Muratori, *Della perfetta poesia italiana*, 1724, vol. 2, p. 33.

# SMOKING FLAX:<sup>1</sup>

## THE STORY OF A RECONVERSION

By  
ANTONIA WHITE

7th October, 1940.

Your letter "out of the blue" touched off a spring—I suppose the question of religion has never been out of my mind since I was a child—but I seem at last to have come to terms with it, at least as far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned. I am afraid that you will be distressed to hear, since you yourself have "painfully climbed back," that I don't think there is any likelihood of my doing the same. Of course, you were "out" for thirty years, and so far I have only been "out" for thirteen, so perhaps I shouldn't be too cocksure. But I have been to and fro over this ground for so long that I think it is unlikely I shall change. I no longer hate and fear the Church as I once did. If I still did that, the chance of my "reconversion" might be more likely. Perhaps I never was a real Roman Catholic since I was neither born into the Church nor "converted" in the usual way. My father became a Catholic when he was thirty-five and I was "received" as a matter of course at the age of seven. So I have always felt something of an "outsider." It is true that I went to a convent school where I absorbed my religion pretty thoroughly and the impression was deep and ineradicable. And, though I have been neither *croyant* nor *pratiquant* for so many years, Catholic expressions and Catholic modes of thought are second nature to me—but definitely *second* nature—I hardly know what my "first nature" was. In the Catholic Church, I am like a child naturalized in a foreign country who has forgotten its own language and has learnt the new language quite

<sup>1</sup> More common amongst French than English writers, these extracts from a correspondence on religious doubts and anxieties give a rare and contemporary record of a return of faith.—*Editor*.

adequately. Now, though I have left my "adopted country," I still instinctively use her language, for there is no other that I know so well. But the naturalized alien never feels quite the same as the native, nor is he treated as such. I know some who, like myself, were brought up as Catholics and have "lapsed" for various reasons; others who remain officially Catholics with varying degrees of discomfort and dissatisfaction. Most of the people I know, though endlessly perplexed about moral, artistic, sociological and philosophical problems, don't seem to feel any need for religion. If they are interested in it, it is only from the historical or psychological standpoint. I do feel an acute desire to try and discover what truth I can, and for years I have thrashed about in an amateurish way, picking up a clue here and there. I haven't got any coherent picture and the results are negative rather than positive. Forgive me if I ask you not to try and "convert" me. I know all the stock arguments from the Catholic angle and I've no doubt you can bring up "spiritual pride" as the clinching one for my refusal to be convinced.

*27th December, 1940.*

Over Christmas I took a step which surprised me; it may surprise you less. A week ago I could have sworn there was no likelihood of my returning to the Catholic Church. I thought, after years of puzzling and tormenting myself, I'd reached a position of neutrality. I could even go to Mass occasionally in the spirit one might revisit a house one had known and loved when a child but never intended to live in again.

Last Monday I stopped in the porch of the local Catholic church to see what time they were celebrating the wartime equivalent of Midnight Mass. For no reason, I wandered into the church itself. I was feeling no more "religious" than if I had just looked up the time of a concert. Several people were waiting their turn for Confession. Suddenly, as if some invisible person were pushing me, I found myself, quite against my will, taking my place in the line. I ordered my body to get up and walk out of the church; it simply refused to obey. When my turn came, I automatically went into the confessional. I've never felt more blankly ridiculous as I did when I heard the little grating noise as the priest drew back the curtain from the grille. Naturally I'd made no preparation for Confession; the time of waiting had

been taken up in insisting to myself that I had not the least intention of going. So I could only mutter, "Father, I've no right to be here at all." He simply proceeded gently with the usual "How long is it since your last Confession?" When I said "Thirteen years" he showed more interest than surprise. I told him I had completely lapsed from faith and practice; that though there were times when I could just imagine practising again, I was as far as ever from believing. Was I willing to practise again in spite of all my doubts? I found myself saying "Yes." He said he would consult the Westminster authorities about the technical side of my case. I won't go into all that again; I explained it to you when we began this vast correspondence last October. Then, much to my surprise, he heard my Confession (after a false start or two I found myself making it as naturally as in the old days), gave me absolution and told me I could go to Communion on Christmas Day. I came away in a queer state; happy, apprehensive, bewildered and amused at myself.

All the same, I did go to Communion on Christmas morning. A very blind, doubting Communion; memories of what it had once meant and questions as to what it could possibly mean now coming up together like two photos on the same film. Also, of course, a sense of peace, relief and "Home again."

You and other Catholics will interpret the whole episode as a great grace; possibly a direct answer to someone's prayer. The people I'm more likely to meet will put it down to the war, escapism, desire for security, mental laziness, middle age, frustration or regression to childhood. I can give them plenty of evidence on each point to support their case.

*31st December, 1940.*

I find it as hard as ever to accept the literal truth of Catholic dogma. Still harder to accept the validity of the reasoning used to establish the "rational" foundation of that dogma. Yet the Church very emphatically states that the existence of God and His creation of the Universe can be clearly known by the natural reason, and one is anathema if one denies this.

When I try to read Maritain or Father D'Arcy on St. Thomas, I can't help feeling that somewhere an illicit assumption has been made and I'm being dazzled by intellectual sleight-of-hand. These brilliant dialecticians profess to reach their conclusions by

methods accessible to all. But they are convinced beforehand that those conclusions are not only humanly correct but divinely guaranteed. It does rather weight the scales. Catholics may say that my reasoning faculty has been perverted by infidelity and a bad life. Certainly as a child, when I accepted every dogma of the Faith on trust, the official proofs of the existence of God "from reason" seemed completely convincing and I was terribly disappointed when, producing them proudly for my first atheist, they made no impression at all. Catholics can hardly say that everyone who is unconvinced by their syllogisms is invincibly ignorant or morally blind. Some years ago, I asked a very holy old parish priest if he would go over them with me again in case I'd got them wrong or misunderstood them. He said, "I knew all that once when I was a seminarist. But I am ashamed to admit I have forgotten them. I only know that I believe in God and that I love Him."

*5th January, 1941.*

My reason refuses equally to serve God or the Devil. In my most anti-Catholic days when I was trying hardest to live by a purely natural philosophy and to exclude all idea of the supernatural, it could never convince me there was not another order of being than this. I could find no logical warrant for it and I tried my hardest to expel it as mere fancy . . . an irrational luxury. But the belief was too strong and instinctive and I could never permanently down it. Now, when I should be only too glad to have a rational excuse for believing in the supernatural, my mind refuses either to provide one or to accept the official proofs. It isn't in my heart I say "There is no God"; it's in my head. This wouldn't matter if the Church didn't insist that my head must affirm too and call me "anathema" if it doesn't.

*9th January, 1941.*

To you I must seem to be accepting "grace" as ungraciously as a creature could. To myself I'm simply following an impulse which may lead nowhere or to whatever I've been blindly hunting for all these years. I'm afraid of losing the little I've found out through experience and through amateurish thinking and study. Yet this fear of loss is itself suspect, and my terror of committing myself wholly to anything has wasted all the best



part of my life. One thing I do know. This time I must be drawn by love and not driven by fear.

*12th January, 1941.*

I won't bore you with details as to why I went through nearly four years of strict analysis in 1934-8. I know you disapprove of Freud though you admit you've never read a word he wrote and have never met a professional psycho-analyst. I am not competent to discuss the theory. I can only tell you the practical results in my own case. Most Catholics would say the practice of my religion would have been just as effective (and much cheaper) in untying a very twisted psychological knot which was preventing me from functioning like a normal human being. The fact is that the bad breakdown which was the first symptom of the trouble occurred long ago when I was a practising Catholic. I went sceptical and hostile and remained so most of the time. Often I felt I would rather be raving or dead than submit to any more. But little by little the pressure yielded and some of the darker patches cleared up. There is nothing sensational about analysis. It is simply a slow, dull, patient process of unravelling tangled threads and monotonously bringing you face to face with extremely humiliating and unpleasant facts about your own nature. For months, even years, you indignantly repudiate them; at last, of your own accord, you accept them. As a result your morbid guilt and terror are lessened and some of your frozen assets released. It doesn't hand you the key of life on a golden plate and doesn't profess to.

*18th January, 1941.*

I've just read three Catholic books. Two by very holy and intelligent priests; one by a saint. It's no good. I can't conquer my repugnance to certain things in Catholicism. I almost wish that the Church would go underground for a time or that something would change one's angle of vision so that it appeared full of force and freshness again, including every part of life, instead of, as it seems to the doubter, excluding so much. I hope you will do your "indictment." An honest attack, coming from a devout and convinced Catholic like yourself, might be much more stimulating than so much specious defence.



24th January, 1941.

In the first few days I put myself through such a third degree of cross-questioning that I nearly drove myself crazy. Of course I did idiotic things; read, or rather devoured, far too many unrelated Catholic books old and new as if a few hours' reading could solve the problems of many years. One night I was in such a state of mental exhaustion that I went to bed very early and read a chapter of Santayana's *Realm of Essence* as a sedative. Somehow, by looking from an entirely different angle, I saw how the Church and its particular method gave coherent form to many of my confused intuitions. Santayana says somewhere "the attempt to speak without speaking any particular language is not more hopeless than the attempt to have a religion that shall be no religion in particular." I don't say there aren't other languages and other methods, but this is the one I know. I speak it with an accent but fluently enough to express in it everything I am likely to want to say.

31st January, 1941.

Of course, the Church's attitude to sex is both a theoretical and a practical difficulty. It seems to be to most lay Catholics of my own and the younger generation. Presumably to yours too, since you admit it contributed a good deal to keeping you out of the Church for thirty years.

After having defied the Church's marriage laws for many years, I've been forced to the conclusion that they are very wise. But under the present economic régime it's rather difficult to know how she expects to house, feed, clothe and educate the large families she expects us to have. I admit the mania for "security" has become almost pathological these days, but is it surprising?

I don't know why physiological chastity preserved from fear should be considered a virtue. Chastity preserved for a positive reason, for people called to a special kind of religious life, is a very different thing. And I can see the point of an unmarried priesthood; a priest shouldn't be a cosy domestic character with a family to worry about and a wife tempting him to gossip about his penitents. I've never personally met an "immoral" priest, but no doubt some have occasional lapses. These, to me,

seem much less scandalous than such things as frightening children into scruples by raising bogies of mortal sin everywhere, preaching them sermons like the one in Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist* which disturbed you so and using their spiritual prestige to pamper their love of power.

5th February, 1941.

I don't understand von Hügel's distinction of "innocent nature." If the Catholic premiss that God created everything is true, then everything in nature is "good" because He made it and the more we know about nature the more we know about one aspect of God. Perhaps one inner meaning of the doctrine of the Fall is that man, being now warped, is forced to see nature in a distorted way, and for him there is an artificial distinction of "good" and "evil." The devil, as Auden points out, is the father, not of lies but of half-truths. He told Eve half the truth about the results of eating the apple.

9th February, 1941.

All my uncertainty and hostility are rampant again. I can only try and keep quiet, go on with mechanical practice and wait for the storm to pass. . . . I run round like a starving animal trying to find food. Over and over again in the saints I find something that nourishes and the next minute something that nauseates. I can't stomach this apparent hatred of nature. I don't mean the idea of disciplining one's impulses, detaching oneself or trying to "love creatures in God" because those ideas appear in all spiritual writers, Christian and non-Christian, and are practically applied by artists in their work and by the "pure of heart" in their inner life.

But when I read of St. Catherine of Siena that, in crushing her natural affections "she turned from her mother's caresses with as much abhorrence as if they had been poison," it seems, however interesting to a psycho-analyst, revolting to an ordinary person. You know very well that St. Catherine is not an isolated case. This element crops up in almost every saint I've ever read about. You say it is the fault of hagiographers, but the facts often come from the saints' own writings. Surely the natural and the supernatural are complementary, not hostile?

15th February, 1941.

Until I've learnt to master my squeamishness I'd better stick to saints whose language doesn't repel me . . . such as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine and Julian of Norwich. Sometimes now a sentence from a saint which seemed mere pious sentiment strikes me as exact. For example, St. Bonaventure's "Transfix me with the most joyous and *healthful* wound of Thy love" and St. Ambrose's "Drive far from us the *hard* spirit of doubting and mistrust."

19th February, 1941.

I've been reading about falconry as a change from the saints. The training of the hawk is like the description of God's breaking-in of the soul in the mystics. It is starved and kept in darkness till it will feed only from its master. Sometimes falcons sulk and sicken and have to be allowed to return to their natural life for a time and then lured back. The whole relationship between the falconer and the falcon is very mysterious and expressed in a ritual language which includes a whole vocabulary of love terms.

14th March, 1941.

There is a terrible passage in St. John of the Cross about the "Dark Night" in which the soul seems to disintegrate and to be swallowed up by a great beast. It is an exact description of what happens to the *mind* threatened with insanity. Obviously St. John's dark night is experienced only by a very high and purified soul, but nothing could give a more vivid idea of the spiritual life lived by a spiritual genius. It makes another order of being with implacable laws of its own seem fact, not speculation. It also shows that true "mysticism" is a tremendous practical undertaking. The soul, by great labour and never by presuming on its own powers, is fitting itself for living in another element.

20th March, 1941.

Perhaps passion, madness and all emotional states have counterparts in the spiritual life which may account for much that seems repulsive or incomprehensible in the lives of the saints. After all, the private lives of most geniuses are shocking to the ordinary person. How would the life of Rimbaud look to someone who cared nothing for his poetry? Maybe we are just as

provincial when we try to judge the saints. And one has to remember their writings, especially those of the mystics, were intended for people trained in the spiritual life and not for amateurs.

All sorts of psycho-pathological states can be paralleled by things recorded about the saints, but you can't prove they are produced by the same cause. Many saints and many artists have been neurotic, but the fact of being neurotic doesn't make a saint or a genius.

I used to be worried because so many saints suffered from appalling illnesses. Freud shows very convincingly how often illness is a "flight from reality," an attempt to solve an unbearable psychic conflict. But those illnesses are unconsciously used as blackmail to force other people to give the sufferer attention he cannot get otherwise. The saints never use illness in this way; they try to hide the fact that they are ill and they never let illness interfere with their activity. Instead of using illness as an escape from responsibility they do just the opposite.

*26th March, 1941.*

I realize that every important spiritual truth is expressed in the Church's dogmas, but for me they can only be intuited, not rationally explained. Perhaps the Creed is a "projection" of supernatural truths, like a map. The exactness of the map to its scale, its fidelity to the convention in which it is drawn are of extreme importance to the traveller who wants to find his way about an unknown country.

*29th March, 1941.*

The sense of something stronger than myself which drives me to try and practise this religion is genuine. So is whatever drives me to criticize it by other standards. Probably E. is right. I should stop talking, reading and arguing about it and commit myself to a "Five-Year Plan" of attempting to *live* it. Forgive me if I don't send you any "difficulties" for your anthology. I must concentrate on swallowing the camel before straining at the gnat. . . .

Perhaps saints are monsters taken in isolation and only to be understood in relation to the whole body of saints and to the life of Christ as mystically lived in the Church. Each

exemplifies some attainable type of spiritual perfection, whereas Christ exemplifies them all. I suspect the saints are highly explosive material to be handled only with precaution and under supervision.

12th April, 1941.

I wish Catholics wouldn't spend so much time in controversy more conspicuous for cheap scoring-off and personal abuse than arguing a case on its merits. Tyrrell used to wish the Church would abandon the sneer as a weapon. Some of our publicists might take Keats' hint: "Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbours."

16th April, 1941.

Spinoza's God whom human beings can love but whom they cannot expect to love them in return is much easier to imagine than the Christian God. God's love for man is *the* revelation of the Gospels; an entirely new element in religion, terrifying as well as consoling. "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful *man*."

As to how the Gospels are now supposed to stand as historical documents, I've no idea. I can't read them otherwise than as the holy books, the words of life, no matter how many glaring discrepancies and unfulfilled predictions they contain. The temptations in the desert, the agony in the garden, the miracles with their perfect precision and economy (not one worked for the sake of working a miracle) are being perpetually enacted. Every human being, past, present and future, takes part in the drama as leper, blind man, thief, prostitute or centurion.

Interesting that Christ doesn't found the Church on St. John, the beloved disciple, but on St. Peter, the stupid one who was always misunderstanding His sayings and who three times denied Him. What St. Peter did and what the Church still does was to recognize Him unconditionally as the Son of God.

23rd April, 1941.

St. Thomas's idea of hell—the soul perpetually fixed in an unnatural attitude—is more expressive than all the pictures of "unending torments." So is Bernanos' definition of hell as the state in which all power to love is lost. Do you remember the devil's saying to St. Bridget, "I am coldness itself"?

26th April, 1941.

I've just finished Bernanos' *Journal of my Times* (translation of *Les Cimetières sous la Lune*, I think). No wonder the behaviour of the Francoists and the Catholic clergy in Majorca stuck in his guts. I can't believe he's not telling the truth about what he saw. Why should he invent? He is Catholic to the bone; his son was a Falangiste. Yes, the book is violent. Thank heaven for that loud imprudent cry of indignation. But a Cardinal has banned it in Canada. On what grounds? Does the Church never beat her breast and say *Mea Culpa*? Bernanos says it is not the Church's errors that scandalize us; we splinter on the rock of her pride. I would like to hear his "atheist's sermon" preached to a congregation of shepherds as well as sheep.

2nd May, 1941.

There is an old shabby man I often see at the Carmelite Church. When people go up to Communion, he comes and kneels at the side on the bare boards with such a look of serene, illuminated love as I've never seen on any face. One remembers such things on frozen and rebellious days.

3rd May, 1941.

Those Catholic "art" shops! They curdle my blood as much as yours. I suppose we've no right to complain if other people find pink sugar Christs and simpering saints more "devotional" than Giotto and Fra Angelico. At least I prefer Catholic churches with their awful Sacred Hearts and Little Flowers to the still more awful bleak Middlebrow "good taste" of the others. I suppose one's love of all the great works of art the Church has produced may easily turn into an art snobbery that has nothing to do with religion. One just has to get over one's queasiness as best one can. Naturally one would like every church to be Chartres and every choir Solesmes, but the church wouldn't be Catholic if it were. And there may even be moments when a great work of art might be a distraction in prayer simply because it is a great work of art and the cheapest mass-produced crucifix serve the purpose better. St. John of the Cross is not a greater saint because he wrote exquisite poems, nor is St. Thérèse of Lisieux a lesser one because she painted execrable pictures. I am preaching this sermon to myself, not to you!



4th May, 1941.

If you are suffering from accidie you have all my sympathy. I took a *sortes* for you from St. Francis de Sales and hit on "His will is that you should serve Him without attraction, without sensible feeling, with repugnance and with anguish of spirit. You will find that when you are no longer thinking of deliverance, God will think of it."

I too have been dry as a bone; full of doubt and disgust. I plod on with the Gospels, go mechanically through the motions of "practising" and try to resign myself to the doubts. If our dogmas are not literally true, they symbolize profound truths. Perhaps such truths can never be demonstrated; only experienced and lived.

8th May, 1941.

I'm blacker, sourer, more rebellious than ever. I always come to the same sticking-point . . . something strained, stuffy, hysterical that pervades the whole atmosphere of Christianity. Not in the Gospels but in practically everything from St. Paul onwards.

Why can't one be a human being, enjoying natural pleasures and enduring natural miseries instead of straining after a hypothetical "other world"? "Spirituality" sometimes seems no more than a kind of refined greediness. Aren't E. and N. who are the best kind of pagans infinitely superior to us as human beings? They practise most of the Christian virtues without expecting a reward and without making all this fuss about it. Why must people demand divine sanctions for perfectly natural human ideals such as justice, truthfulness, etc.? The relief sometimes of seeing the world as haphazard and purposeless where the rose fades and the sparrow falls without being part of some gigantic apocalyptic plan! Why, because we can form a convenient concept of love in the abstract and justice in the abstract, assume that these convenient concepts actually exist in the way a just man or a loving woman exist? You make these abstractions, you impute existence to them and you finally assume an "infinite Being" who is them all. It seems a very queer process of reasoning, multiplying any number of *entia praeter necessitatem*.

13th May, 1941.

Frankly I never have been able to see your "either . . . or" point of view. Why should there be no alternatives other than your "blind dance of atoms or a universe created by an all-powerful, all-good God who is also a spirit"? And why should human values, truth, beauty, etc., cease to be values for human beings even on the "blind dance of atoms" assumption? There always have been human beings who did value them and I can't see what theism or atheism or speculations on the nature and origin of the universe have got to do with the question. It's no good; I remain invincibly ignorant when confronted with the official proofs of the existence of God; design, contingency, prime mover, etc. A watch implies a watchmaker only to someone who can already attach a meaning to the terms "watch" and "watchmaker." After centuries scientists and philosophers are still wrangling over the meaning of the terms "matter" and "spirit."

18th May, 1941.

Unlike the Church, Christ makes no appeal whatever to reason and insists all the time on faith. The whole theme of the Gospels is believe, believe, believe. I can only take the Gospels and the Church together; neither is explicable without the other.

I puzzle and puzzle over the anathema on those who deny that "God can be known with certainty by means of created things and through the light of reason" and the affirmation in the anti-modernist oath that "through the visible works of creation the existence of God can certainly be known as a cause by its effect and therefore demonstrated." By using the words "created things" she already implies a creator and the proposition is mere juggling with words. In the term "God" is concealed the idea of an omnipotent personal spirit who created the universe. The conclusions are assumed in the very form of the argument.

Reason won't help me—or at least, not this kind of reasoning. So one is driven back on faith. The catechism defines faith as a "supernatural gift of God which enables us to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed." Two troubles here: (a) it seems to make hay of the "intellectual certainty" position which the Church seems to have assumed; (b) it assumes there

is a God, that He has made a revelation and that this revelation is contained in the teaching of the Church.

I hate being so perverse. I want to have faith. But I don't see how I can ever arrive at it by the intellectual approach . . . at least not in the way it is now formulated. I've got to swallow the creed whole or reject it entirely. Perhaps its true significance lies in the delicate balance of its parts. Once you suppress or over-emphasize or isolate any of those parts, you wreck the whole thing. That may be what heresy means. What impresses me most about the Church is the mysterious principle of life she has in her. Over and over again when she seems on the point of decay she renews herself in a fresh access of spiritual vitality. There is an unbroken chain of saints from St. Paul to the present day, all nourished on the same principles. Dogmas may have been laboriously defined over centuries, a whole mass of ritual and devotional practice developed, but everything explicit in the most modern saint is implicit in the most ancient.

*23rd May, 1941.*

I see no solution but faith. And that I haven't got except in spots. People talk as if faith were easy . . . a kind of mental conjuring trick. You shut your eyes, say "I believe" and presto, nothing disturbs you any more. As if by "surrendering your intellect" you were lapped in cosy security for ever. Francis Thompson knew better when he wrote:

Clinging with bloody clutch and feet  
The painful juts of jagged faith.

Some of the people who say how they envy Catholics their blind faith might glance into St. Jeanne Françoise de Chantal and St. Thérèse of Lisieux and see the agonies of doubt and darkness from which they suffered.

I do pray for faith. But a reasonable, cultured voice which the Church would say was the devil whispers, "Naturally if you pray hard enough for faith, you'll find yourself believing. You must want to believe or you wouldn't be praying for faith. What is it St. Paul says? 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for.' How much better he puts it than the cant modern 'wishful thinking.' After all, you haven't found this life entirely satisfactory, have you? Don't think I'm blaming you for a moment.

I've often wished I could make the same adjustment. I've suffered more than you think for being so infernally reasonable. I'm quite sure 'faith' will help you take a far more adult attitude towards frustration and so on. After all, that is the real point of religion, isn't it? To help one make a successful psychological adaptation to life. I think you're very wise, very realistic even. Why should a cripple try to walk without a crutch? I'm sure I wish you luck."

*1st June, 1941.*

Alternations between faith (sometimes dim, sometimes less dim) and total blankness, darkness, emptiness as violent as ever. The transitions are often very sudden. I go on "practising" in a dumb, dogged kind of way, concentrating on any aspect to which I can respond at the moment. Often I am tempted to look over the wall into the Heard-Huxley territory or other schools based on Taoist or Buddhist principles. But with my strong bias to pride, I am pretty sure "ours" is better for me, being mixed, earthy, despised and unfashionable. The Church is not eclectic; there are no mysteries, no initiations. But once inside you have a wide choice of steep roads, if you are drawn to them, and a wide choice of authentic guides.

*6th June, 1941.*

I always come back to the same point—to Christ. I read His words and I believe them. But how do I know they were His words or that there was ever such a person? Having no idea how the historical problem stood outside the Church, I've been glancing, these last weeks, at a mixed bunch of "experts"; ex-Catholics, Protestants, Agnostics and Rationalists. My head swam. One claimed that nothing had been conclusively established but the fact that Christ died. Another school, fiercely opposed by Loisy, had decided the whole thing was a myth. Eisler, in a vast work of erudition produced evidence not only for the life of Christ but for every detail of His personal appearance. Another was convinced that the resurrection was an historical event but that it was no proof that Christ was divine. One French writer made out a most convincing case, based on St. Paul's epistles, that Christ was a spiritual experience of St. Paul and the other apostles and that the Gospels, written after

the event, were constructed in accordance with Old Testament prophecies to give the pseudo-historical setting which the next generation of believers were beginning to demand. How can an ignorant person form a rational opinion when the scholars disagree? Christ, as a living power and person, has been operative in the Christian saints from the time of St. Paul. It is "of faith" to believe that He lived, died and was resurrected on earth and that He was the Son of God.

I have an ingenious solution on "believing" days. If Christ lived on earth (it has not been proved that He did not) His divinity was only recognized by faith. He insists always on this necessity for faith. Therefore each generation to whom Christ is presented must be in the same position as His first hearers . . . the evidence of His divinity for ordinary people must be quantitatively the same. Today we have just enough evidence not to *disprove* His actual existence as a man; and we have "witnesses" of His divinity in the Church and in the living experience of the saints. But, like the Jews, we are free to accept or reject the testimony. I don't see how there could be a more inspired method of presenting Christ to successive generations for faith or denial than the combination of teaching authority and mystical experience which makes up the Church. It is this clear persistence of faith, in spite of worldliness, corruption, superstition that makes one listen to her. But my ingenious theory gets me no further with my real difficulty, her apparent insistence that her basic articles of faith can be deduced by the intellect. Why doesn't she call them articles of knowledge?

14th June, 1941.

The paradoxes of theology such as the immanence and transcendence of God, the indwelling of Christ in the soul, the union of the nature of God and the nature of man in Christ seem quite meaningless as verbal statements. Yet over and over again the Catholic mystics assert that they have apprehended in experience what they accepted on faith. One forgets that the real "doctors of the Church" who shaped her theology were all men of prayer and nearly all mystics. St. Augustine, St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas himself were mystics. In the history of the Church, the experience came first, the formulation after. No one could



be more "orthodox" than St. John of the Cross who is also a doctor of the Church. It is odd he is such a favourite of Heard and Huxley who both seem too spiritually fastidious to accept anything so concrete as a creed. My trouble with Heard and Huxley is that from their writings they give the impression they want to ascend Mount Carmel in a lift instead of toiling up on foot.

In a sense the great mystics stand to the ordinary body of "the faithful" as the great scientists do to the ordinary public. In matters of science the ordinary person cheerfully accepts statements he cannot possibly verify. The scientist is in a position to test those statements by experiment. So might the saint say, "You could prove my statements in your own self. But the laboratory conditions of the experiment are desire, faith, discipline and grace." Theological speculation by the intellect alone can degenerate into the most frivolous verbal quibbling. But the great doctrines of Faith were prayed and lived before they were crystallized into formulas.

*18th August, 1941.*

During the last week, after months of oscillation and mental confusion, I felt I reached firm ground for a moment. I can only describe it by saying it was as if an eye opened somewhere inside me, an eye very filmed and feeble but just able to make out a dim outline. It was not the same as shutting the eyes of one's mind and forcing oneself to say "I believe." Nor was it the sudden rational perception which sees the solution of a problem. It was as if, with the eyes of the mind wide open, seeing all the loose ends, all the contradictions, all the gaps to be bridged, this inner eye perceived that the surface was not quite opaque and that an infinite perspective opened out beyond it. It was as if a two-dimensional creature realized for a moment the possibility of a third dimension. Or as if some part of one's being one did not know was sensitive had been touched with the utmost delicacy and precision. Nothing is harder than to give you the least idea of this experience which was accompanied by no feeling of warmth or "devotion." I made a note of it at the time so that, when the inevitable doubts and reactions begin again, I should have it on record that I had one moment of deep conviction. I can hardly even call it "faith." It was perhaps only a perception of the necessity for faith.

## REVIEWS

### ANIMAL MAGNETISM

*Themes and Variations*, by Aldous Huxley (Chatto and Windus 12s 6d)

LOOKING back with profound satisfaction on his own career, Thomas Henry Huxley said:

To my observation, human nature has not sensibly changed during the last thirty years. I doubt not that there are truths as plainly obvious and as generally denied as those contained in . . . this book<sup>1</sup> now awaiting enunciation. If there is a young man of the present generation, who has taken as much trouble as I did to assure himself that they are truths, let him come out with them. *Veritas praevalebit*—some day. And even if she does not prevail in his time, he himself will be all the better and the wiser for having tried to help her. And let him recollect that such great reward is full payment for all his labour and pains.

It is, of course, resounding bunkum; but it is the sort of bunkum by which the Old Man of the Tribe has always kept his hold over the young and laid a dead hand upon his impressionable descendants. The old Huxley had good reason to be satisfied with himself; for there is no denying that when a new idea was going, Thomas Henry had been formidably quick off the mark; and, as he sonorously conveys again and again in his book, he picked a winner. Darwinism triumphed; truth prevailed, although in Thomas Henry's irritable phrase "it is curious what a long time she takes about prevailing." Nevertheless, let the young do as he did. After all, there is certain to be some idea lying around neglected, that, properly advertised, will change the world. There must be some new Darwin pottering in comparative privacy over his earthworms. Find him! All that is needed is steady reading, an open mind, a good prose style, and the trick is done. Another statue will be raised to another Huxley, and so on for as far as thought can reach.

But suppose one does one's best. Suppose one reads everything, including the whole *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; suppose one has a mind as open as the Blackwall Tunnel and suppose one has the best prose style since Jonathan Swift. And suppose there are no Darwins. What then? Thomas Henry never thought of that. But for a generation Aldous Huxley has made all his admirers think of it, and with no little sadness. Under the shadow of the Old Man he has been throwing ideas at us collected from all the four corners of the earth, and in such

<sup>1</sup> *Man's Place in Nature*, by Thomas Henry Huxley (1894).

numbers that by the law of averages alone it would seem that one of them would have rung a bell and set all the lights of Progress flashing. But no; there were no more Darwins.

What happens then? Well, one becomes more than a little introspective, as do most people with terrifying relatives; one becomes conscious of a personal failure. For a person like Aldous Huxley, who cannot but know that he has been given powers that outstrip all but a handful of his contemporaries, such introspection can be very painful. In this, his latest, book, he describes his feelings at watching the unveiling of his grandfather's statue. It is no wonder, with forebears such as he has, that he was nearly sick in someone's top-hat.

The principal theme, then, of his latest book is an introspective philosopher, a Frenchman named Biran with chronic indigestion. Biran was a sufficiently bad philosopher to have been left quietly lying in his grave, but he kept an intimate journal of his personal shortcomings and thus played straight into Mr. Huxley's hands. Mr. Huxley is a philosopher, Mr. Huxley is introspective, and Mr. Huxley is one of the two most powerful satirical novelists alive; Biran hasn't a chance. On the very first page we find him stripped and lying in a spa bath, inhaling sulphuretted hydrogen, trying to read Pascal and ruefully reflecting "that all his own troubles had arisen from this desire to seem what he was not." On page 5 he is in exquisitely comical agonies because a Duchess has given him a dirty look; a little farther on he allows a termagant relative to bully his two daughters into an early grave. Not, to my knowledge, since Pangloss, has a philosopher been so roughly handled as he is in this book, and not for many years has Aldous Huxley written as well about a character, either of fact or his own fiction. It does not soften the blows for Mr. Huxley to claim that he is only quoting from the philosopher's own diary. Biran did not write:

... and in spite of his indigestion he hurries off to another party, where he will feel even more of an alien than at the Abbé's. ... And one calls oneself a philosopher, one cultivates the inner life, one aspires to perfection! But one mustn't be late; one mustn't be late. Tell the cabman to whip up his horse. If one goes to one's humiliation, it may as well be at the gallop.

Only Aldous Huxley himself can be so economically unkind.

It is good; it is very good; it is too good to last. By the thirty-third page one can almost hear old Thomas Henry drumming impatiently on the rostrum. The young man is very satirical, no doubt; he writes with a certain elegance. But where is the pursuit of Truth? Where is the undiscovered factor (like, for instance, Darwinism) that to bring forward to the light of day is its own reward? One turns a page, and

our own Huxley ominously clears his throat. There is a preliminary fanfare of paragraphs about Hitler and concentration camps; there is a sort of prose-hush; and then it comes, piping hot and straight off the stove: *Animal Magnetism*.

This is the Variation, and it is a variation with a vengeance. Biran himself would have nothing whatever to do with Animal Magnetism. He ignored it. Mr. Huxley finds this astonishing. Mr. Huxley is convinced that it would have cured him of his indigestion. In fact, Mr. Huxley thinks it will cure a lot of people of a lot of things. After all, Harriet Martineau was cured of a much worse indigestion, and in *four weeks*.

Truth, in her case, was not so curiously long about prevailing. And just like Thomas Henry, our own Mr. Huxley is no hand at waiting. He plunges into Animal Magnetism with a zest which almost sweeps one away. Who knows but that some mesmeric Darwin is not even now showing his light under some obscure bushel? If so, let us have no prejudices. Let us have open minds; and above all, let us not be late.

But thinking is not best done in a hurry and the thinking in this book is not always very good. For instance, Mr. Huxley does not like the Catholic Church. He dislikes it largely, I gather, because it is run by priests, and he argues that priests are not concerned for the truth but only for the welfare of other priests. But Mr. Huxley does like Yoga. This in India is run by Brahmins for the welfare of Brahmins, and Brahmins are priests. But they are not, I suppose, in California.

However, we Catholics should notice that Mr. Huxley is not wholly against us. He thinks that our mystics have something to be said for them. He is merely not interested in the process of redemption, penance, purgatory, hell and heaven. It is, indeed, a lengthy business. Mystics are brisker, and he mentions with respect the various techniques of getting one's mind, here and now, in the presence of God. Yoga, of course, is even quicker. Under proper instruction, the neophyte levitates quite soon.

It is a frame of mind which I have learned to understand. When living in Bombay I found that each year brought out a surprising number of distinguished Englishmen and Americans in search of the Hidden Truth, which they knew to be in India, and which they hoped to contact, preferably before the monsoon broke. I used to take them to the only Yogi that I knew, who was a charlatan, but also a wit. He would unsmilingly ask them, "And how long are you in India for?" And they would as unsmilingly answer "Six months, Guruji," or sometimes name a smaller figure, for India is an expensive place and does run away with the money.

Animal Magnetism can be found nearer home, but the reader should not be too readily relieved. Yoga has not been dropped. It is as strongly recommended as ever. He must practise that, *and* Animal Magnetism, *and* mysticism, all at once. After such a discipline, it is hard to believe that he will be much concerned with the last thing that he has to practise which, according to Mr. Huxley's final essay, is birth-control.

Does it matter? I do not mean does Animal Magnetism matter. Of course it matters; it is quite as important as Vedanta, regionalism, doing without glasses, pacifism and deep-breathing. I mean does Mr. Huxley's desire to save the world affect his position as a man of letters? In my view, not in the least. His position is at the top, and no better evidence of it can be found than his essays in this book on Goya, El Greco, Piranesi, and Baroque Art. They are among the most adult things published since the war. They make this book a remarkable one; all intelligent men must read some of it, although few intelligent men will want to read it all. As for Mr. Huxley's faults, they have been shared by the very best. *Robinson Crusoe* is a great book, but to the day of his death Defoe held that the public had got the book quite wrong. It was not an adventure story; it was a symbolic history of Salvation and he even wrote a key to prove it. He was, he insisted, not a mere writer, he was a Thinker.

It is an amiable weakness. Time, and the reading of one's own Collected Edition are the only remedies.

AUBREY MENEN

#### MR. ELIOT'S COMEDY

*The Cocktail Party*, by T. S. Eliot (Faber 10s 6d).

WITH *The Cocktail Party* the modern verse drama has grown up. It is the first play for at least a century which accepts verse completely and unselfconsciously as its natural medium, as the form of speech which its characters use because it is the only language they know. It is first and foremost a play: one may speak of it as a play in verse, but only as one might speak of *Les Femmes Savantes* as a play in French. It creates, and, having created, takes for granted, a whole convention which did not exist before, and because of this it seems no more deliberately "poetic" than do the plays of Middleton and Massinger. Indeed, though less profound than the one and more coherent than the other, it is the sort of play which either of them might have written if he had been alive to-day.

There is no need to do more than outline the plot. Edward Chamberlayne is giving a party, and trying to conceal the fact that his wife has just left him. Among the guests is a stranger to whom



Edward confides, and who promises to bring back Lavinia (the wife) the next day. We learn now that Edward and Celia (another of the guests) have been lovers, but the departure of Lavinia, instead of leaving Edward free, merely makes him realize that he is not capable of the sacrifice, the decision, which would take him to Celia. We learn later that Lavinia too has had a lover—Peter Quilpe, who is now in love with Celia. Lavinia returns, but only to see that Edward and she are in the same isolation:

A man who finds himself incapable of loving  
And a woman who finds that no man can love her.

The second act takes us to the consulting-room of the stranger who is now revealed as Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly. His function in society is left deliberately vague—he is something of a psycho-analyst, something of a judge, and something of a priest. He is an agent through whom the divine purpose works in man (though, for the purpose of the play, the question of divinity is carefully avoided). And he is one of the "Guardians"—one of those in whom

The self that can say "I want this—or want that"—  
The self that wills . . .

has come to terms

With the obstinate, the tougher self; who does not speak,  
Who never talks, who cannot argue.

Sir Henry had for his accomplices two other Guardians who turn out to be characters previously presented to us in the light of comedy, whose apparently frivolous behaviour has led to the point in which Edward and Lavinia and later Celia come to consult the doctor. To the two former Sir Henry's advice is "to make the best of a bad job." They have been shown themselves as they really are—which is a disillusion; they have been shown themselves as they appear to others—which is a humiliation. They now know what their situation is, and it is for them to accept it and not to try to evade it. They must reconcile themselves to the human condition. They must learn to be

. . . contented with the morning that separates  
And with evening that brings together  
For casual talk before the fire  
Two people who know they do not understand each other.

That is the choice for Edward and Lavinia. But for Celia there is a second road, the rejection of the world, the way of sanctity. This she accepts. She is to go into a sanatorium (which seems a sort of

monastic retreat house) and there she will learn where her road is to lead her. She makes her choice bravely and confidently, but after she has gone, Sir Henry begins to doubt his right to give the advice he has given. Julia reassures him:

She will be afraid of nothing; she will not even know  
That there is anything there to be afraid of.  
She is too humble. She will pass between the scolding hills,  
Through the valley of derision, like a child sent on an errand  
In eagerness and patience. Yet she must suffer.

The play is now virtually over—there is no further development of idea or action. Yet one waits for the last act anxious to find how things have worked out. Edward and Lavinia are giving another party. They have learned something of tolerance and sympathy. Peter Quilpe has returned from Hollywood, where he has given up pretensions of being a novelist and is making honest "phoney" films. Celia is not present, but we learn that she went out to Africa as a member of a nursing order to work in a native hospital, and there, during an insurrection, she was murdered by crucifixion near an ant-hill.

Because the announcement of Celia's death is the most dramatic moment in the last act, some critics have been deceived into thinking that it is the focal point of the play. But Celia did not choose death; she chose to devote herself to the lives of others. Her death was triumphant, as Sir Henry says; but it was not a denial of life. It had a purpose; but, in relation to her choice, it was an accident.

The play, then, is no glorification of death or of pain (Celia, as a nurse, is actively concerned in fighting pain), and the road chosen by Edward and Lavinia is, in its own way, as good a road as Celia's. It must be admitted, however, that Mr. Eliot does not make it nearly so interesting, dramatically speaking. Indeed, he finds it hard to understand the ordinary man's muddled, but not necessarily feeble, gropings towards the good life. Moreover, he tends to magnify the area of ordinariness—his definition of the ordinary man might be that of someone who has to read his Dante in translation. Edward and Lavinia are sent back

To the stale food mouldering in the larder,  
The stale thoughts mouldering in their minds.

But, though this may be inevitable for them, it should not be regarded as typical of the road they have chosen. Simple, ordinary people often have quite clean larders, and their thoughts are not bound to be stale because they are not original. Against this, however, we have a most

delightful picture of human goodness in the characters of two of the Guardians—not the dictatorial and rather inhuman Sir Henry, but Julia and Alex. In the first act Julia is seen as the stock comedy dowager (though her wit comes more from Miss Compton-Burnett than from Wilde), forgetting things, losing things, contradicting herself, poking her nose into other people's business. And Alex appears as a jovial uncle, with good intentions but no gumption, always trying to help people and always putting his foot into it. That is how they look from the outside. Then in the second act they are revealed in their true character. This change, I feel, is not managed altogether successfully—even as revealed Guardians they should have retained their former personality; Julia should still have been fussy and Alex putty-fingered. But as we look back again on the first act with new understanding, and see Alex cheerfully scrambling a month's egg ration, or Julia in a twitch about her keys, we can enjoy the most charitable and affectionate picture of man which Mr. Eliot has yet given us.

The form of the play, as is well known, is that of fashionable comedy, and Mr. Eliot manages the mechanics of his plot with great skill. The use of the telephone—a cliché of the modern stage—has here an underlying irony which is not obvious at a first seeing. Nothing much happens in the last act, but this does not greatly matter as we are too concerned to find out the full facts about what has already happened. The only place where the play flags at all is towards the end of the first act, where Lavinia's return does not arouse enough curiosity as to what will happen next.

The verse is easy, unobtrusive, lightly stressed, and in the comic passages is most excitingly reminiscent of *Sweeney Agonistes*. In its utility, its adaptability to any purpose, from that of analysing damnation to that of refusing potato crisps, it is by far the most effective verse form yet devised for the modern stage. The play, however, is confined to the drawing-room not just in its action but in most of its imagery, and we miss the mists and shadows of *The Family Reunion* and the medieval marginal illuminations of *Murder in the Cathedral*. Again, though Mr. Eliot has adapted his play to the conventions of the fashionable theatre he has not really brought it nearer to everyday life. His usual audience is not restricted to the West End or to Broadway, and many of his readers may find that Edward and Lavinia are less like the people they know than were the Tempters of *Murder* even though the latter were only abstractions. *The Cocktail Party*, in fact, succeeds, not because it compromises with conventional stage realism, but because in its picture of a small and bizarre segment of society it reveals something of the reality which is shared by the world outside that segment.

NORMAN NICHOLSON

## ORDINARY SUPERNATURAL LIVES

*The Lost Traveller*, by Antonia White (Eyre and Spottiswoode 10s 6d).

THIS is Miss Antonia White's first novel since her *Frost in May* of 1933. The present reviewer took it up with many misgivings. Had not *The Times* critic recorded of it, however sympathetically, that it was "inclined to emphasize the advantages of belonging to the Roman Catholic Church rather as if the intention were to advertise a saleable commodity," and advised that much that it stated explicitly would have been better left implicit, "in the background"? For once, however, *The Times* reviewer had nodded, and it was pleasant to find that his judgment was badly mistaken. The novel's central characters are indeed all Catholics, ordinary good ones, and it is the Catholic idea of the love and service of God, of His touch on the mind and heart and of vocation, that in the end explains their purposes. It is also no doubt responsible for the extra dimension of seriousness and profundity that the novel moves in.

Not that it is in the least a "pious" or purposively "edifying" novel. Miss White is too good a novelist, too sincere and sensitive, to inflict that horror on us. The characters are almost all the time occupied with other things than their faith, and other things shape their everyday decisions and attitudes. The book is about the growing up of a girl between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, in her schools and with her school-friends, in London and Sussex, with a father and mother whose marriage is far from radiantly happy or harmonious. Miseries and frustrations and grievances, and the burdens of drabness and mediocrity, find outlet in occasions of themselves trivial. But are they trivial? It is, I think, part of Miss White's very remarkable success that we feel that they both are and are not, that behind the trivial and the ordinary is a pressure of the pattern and direction of lives uniquely lived, and that the living of them in the last resort hangs not on sociological or inter-personal or sexual or cultural factors only, but on a recognition of divine purposes, however baffling they may be.

The protagonists are depicted with complete and clear-headed sympathy and charity, and, for all the subtleties and complexities of their natures that Miss White never shirks, they are fully alive, grasped and communicated "in the round." The gradual growth of the girl is exquisitely told. Even Isabel, the wife, is conveyed with complete conviction, difficult problem though she must have been. Drama is an immeasurably more difficult medium for portraying profound inner life than is the novel, and the comparison cannot perhaps be made with propriety; none the less Isabel's inner change recalls, not altogether ineptly, that of the Chamberlaynes in Mr. T. S. Eliot's

*The Cocktail Party*: it is akin to it, and is more skilfully and persuasively worked out.

The writing is economical and elegant. Both the story and the people are worth-while. But perhaps the most striking characteristic of this very unusual and distinguished novel is, after all, the convincing quality of the ordinary but unique inner lives and relationships of the characters, of delicate spiritual change and growth. A woman writer succeeds in this, when she does succeed, better than a man, for she is less apt to confuse an image of life with life. Her penetration, too, is usually keener and more accurate. Miss White enjoys these advantages to the full, and has as well an extra depth to her perceptions.

VINCENT TURNER

### WEEP FOR ADONAI

*A Life of John Keats*, by Dorothy Hewlett (Hurst and Blackett 25s).

KEATS is one of the poets whom Browning would have put in the category "subjective" and on whose behalf he insisted that "in our approach to the poetry, we necessarily approach the personality of the poet: in apprehending it we apprehend him, and certainly we cannot love it without loving him. Both for love's and for understanding's sake we desire to know him, and as readers of his poetry must be readers of his biography also." It is clearly in this spirit that Miss Hewlett undertook her life of Keats; and there is sufficient truth in it to make this sympathetic, just and comprehensive account a useful companion to the study of the poems. In the second edition of her book, which was originally entitled *Adonais*, she has added some interesting new material.

The biographer of any artist, particularly a modern artist, may take either of two courses: he may keep closely to known events in the life of his subject, resisting all temptation to speculate about the effect of this or that event on particular works; or he may write a "spiritual biography," something as near as possible to the imaginative reconstruction of the life of the mind which Wordsworth gives us in *The Prelude* and Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. With Keats the choice is a difficult one. In a sense his life cries out for the latter method: "A Man's life of any worth is a continual allegory—and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life—a life like the scriptures, figurative." And there is the *Fall of Hyperion* inviting fresh interpretation. But Miss Hewlett has chosen against dealing with the poems at all closely. For all her enthusiasm for the poetry, it is the life of the man outside his writings, from his birth at the Swan and Hoop Livery Stables to his death in the Piazza di Spagna, that is here fully and (in the main) restrainedly described. The poetry is quoted most often



when it throws direct light on the life, so that the sonnet "Read me a Lesson, muse, and speak it loud" and the gay inconsequent verses from the letters which reveal the variety of Keats' moods are given a prominent place. Where she speaks at length of the poems Miss Hewlett tends to confine herself to superficial aspects: she gives us several pages on the use of colour in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. But contemporary criticism is extensively quoted, and we are given a full picture of the quality of the reception accorded the poems by various groups. Valuable as all this is, it is impossible not to regret that no fresh interpretation of the poetry is offered by a scholar who knows so much about the man. Miss Hewlett has added a good deal that is new to our knowledge of Keats' family and the vicissitudes of his life; but the highlights of the book are the generous quotations from the letters, and the last chapters, which are derived directly from Severn's account of Keats' last illness. We already have a fine edition of the letters, and an "autobiography" constructed from them by B. V. Weller; while *The Keats Circle* gives easy access to Severn's letters. The student will go straight to these sources. What is wanted even more than a new biography is a full-length critical study. Miss Hewlett might have cleared the way by keeping the intellectual and reading Keats more in the foreground. It would have been interesting, for example, to have heard more of the interest in Dante felt by Keats and his friends; Cary's translation was an event, and Keats was eventually led to read the *Divina Commedia* in the original.

The biographer of Keats is still expected to contradict Arnold, damn the reviewers, and ask again the unanswerable question, "What would he have done if he had lived?" Miss Hewlett has done these things intelligently. She has emphasized Keats' masculine qualities: he is described as a boy noted at school for his ability as a "bruiser" and as a man endowed with a happy wit and extraordinary courage and decision. The *Quarterly* and *Blackwood's* reviews are dealt with fully and judiciously. Although Keats was not killed by these attacks, he was very much affected by them: when illness weakened him he brooded over them in a manner which must have done him grave harm.

Keats' is one of the most sombre of life-stories—"O, that something fortunate had ever happened to me or my brothers!"—and Miss Hewlett's telling of the last part, unrelieved by any emphasis on his positive achievement, makes sad reading. But there is some relief in his great fortitude and in the devotion shown by Severn, whom Miss Hewlett has made a symbol of balanced and healthy life in the account of uncertainty, misfortune, and lack of religious faith which makes up the final chapters of her book.

JANE H. JACK

## HOPKINS AND TRADITION

*Gerard Manley Hopkins*, by The Kenyon Critics (Dobson 7s 6d).

To those whose reading was still circumscribed in 1945, these reprints from the *Kenyon Review* will be most welcome for their "scholarship and insight." It was not necessary, or accurate, of their publisher to add: "which recent biographical studies of the poet have lacked." The clear light of these critical essays needs no such invidious bushel. Although following so hard upon a similar collection (*Immortal Diamond*) this book does not suffer by comparison; it is slighter but more incisive. Its general tendency is to restore Hopkins to Tradition. With two exceptions, all the essays have a definitive ring, and the grinding note is pleasantly absent. The exceptions are interestingly ultra-traditional. Mr. Whitehall makes Hopkins start at scratch from the medievals, and sheer off, *in vacuo*, into pure music; to the accompaniment of an invisible swing-band, he dragoons the poems into dipodic quatrimeters. Mr. McLuhan overtaxes the eye rather than the ear, by bringing three analogical mirrors into play simultaneously. But both these essays have brilliant flashes amid the oracular smoke. The absence of Mr. Leavis's article is to be regretted. Also the absence of any treatment of Caradoc's soliloquy. Surely this piece of verse is Hopkins's supreme title to fame, and ranks with the great passages of *King Lear* and *Samson Agonistes*? If one might express a personal preference, it would be for the last and first essays, by Mr. Mizener and Mr. Warren.

There are two polar types of poet—the "maker" or craftsman, and the self-explorer who renovates the art through work on himself and the language. . . . Hopkins is a curious case of "maker" moving, by force of his tension, into self-explorer.

Within their decorously-observed limits, these essays are packed with quiet reflective wisdom.

CHRISTOPHER DEVLIN

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